THE NEW REPUBLIC

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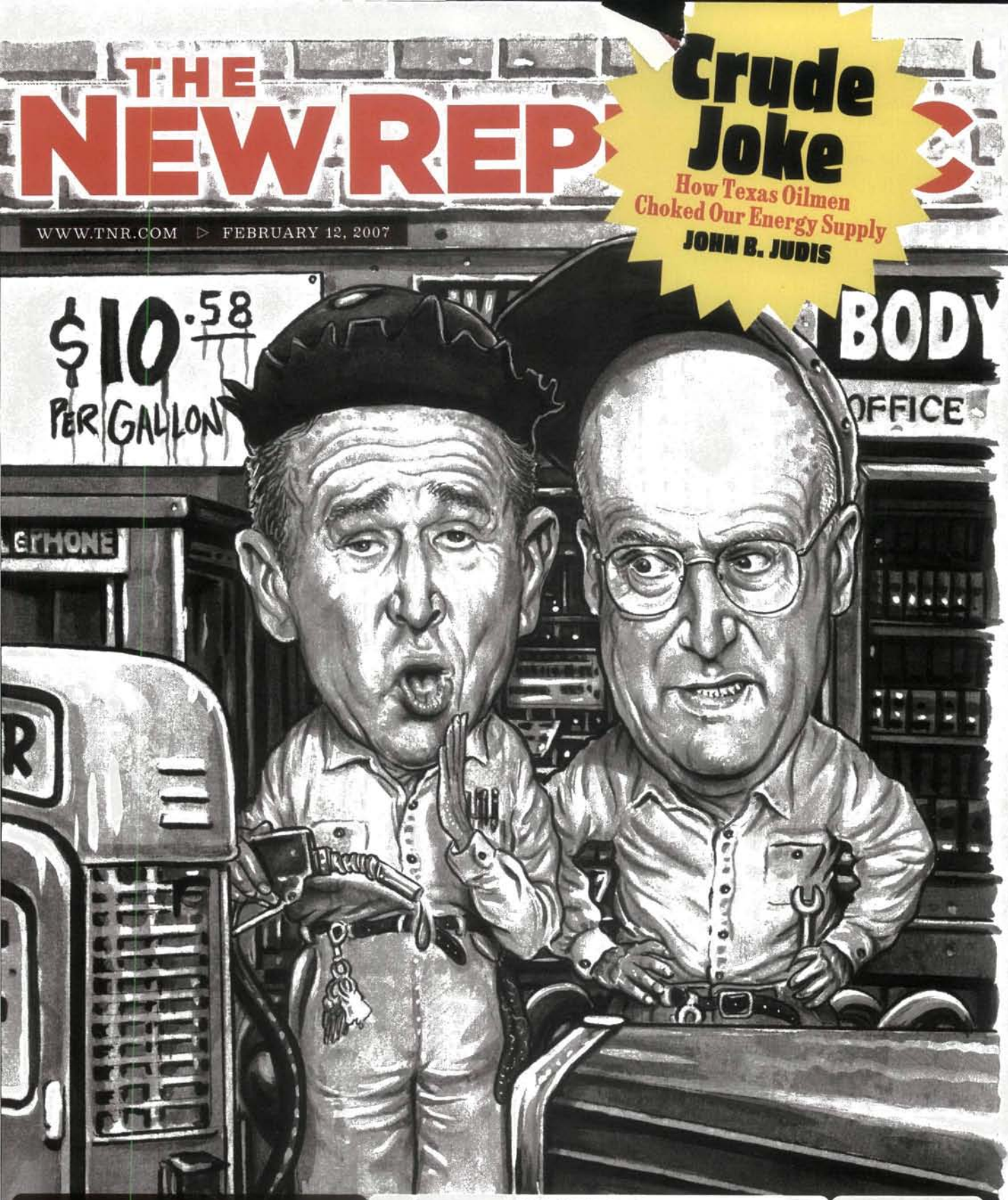
Crude Joke

How Texas Oilmen Choked Our Energy Supply

JOHN B. JUDIS



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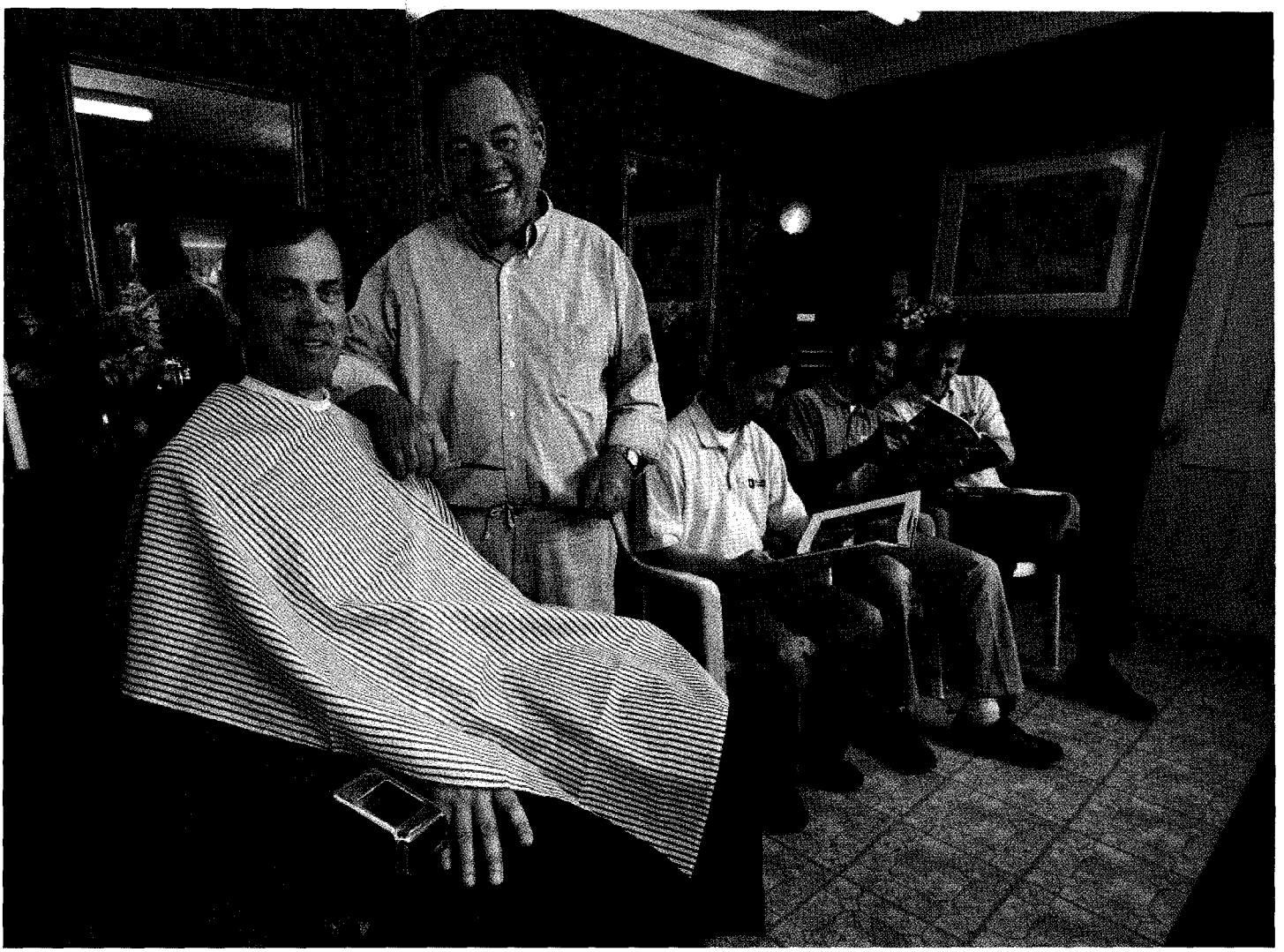

This barber knows his cutting-edge automotive technology

I'm Henry Besanceney, the only barber in Honeoye Falls, a small town in upstate New York. When you have GM's top scientists in your chair like I do, you get to know a lot about the newest cutting edge technologies. A whole lot. I've learned they're engineering the first drivable hydrogen fuel cell by-wire powertrains. It's an innovation that will outperform today's engines on cost, power and durability. The only thing missing is the pollutants. That's because the only emission the fuel cells produce is pure, clean water vapor. Now that's refreshing!

They say GM is also employing other renewable fuel technologies in their vehicles, like E-85 ethanol made from corn. You'd have to talk to a barber in Nebraska about that one.

Henry A. Besanceney

Henry Besanceney

GM

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
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CORRESPONDENCE

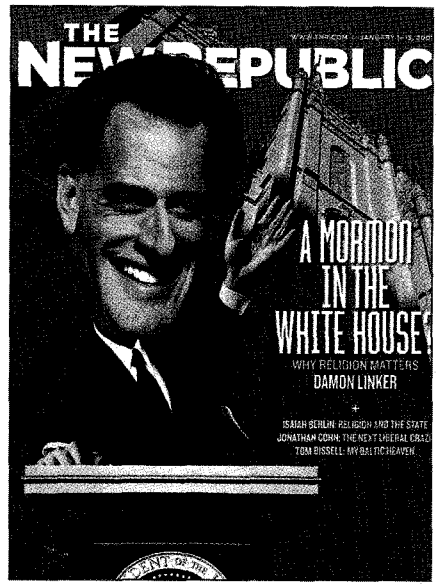
NEVER AGAIN. NO, REALLY

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON IS ABSOlutely correct to call for a division dedicated to genocide intervention within the U.S. Armed Forces ("The Ideal Army," January 1–15). There would definitely be a percentage of willing Americans from the idealistic and realistic Darfur advocate community who would volunteer for this just cause—including myself. Nevertheless, it is important not to jump to U.S. military intervention as an immediate solution for Darfur. There are still several key steps the Bush administration must take before shipping troops to Africa. First, the president should coordinate with the French to enforce a no-fly zone and prevent the gunships from carpet-bombing innocent civilians. Second, the president should commit to funding a 20,000-strong U.N. force, most likely comprising troops from African and South Asian countries. Third, the president should impose capital market sanctions to cut off the credit line the Sudanese government is using to carry out a genocide. Americans must understand that it will require sacrificing our lives and resources to truly make "never again" a commitment we can keep, instead of just an empty promise.

MARK HANIS
Executive Director
Genocide Intervention Network
Washington, D.C.

ROTTEN IN DENMARK

JONATHAN COHN IS CORRECT THAT the example of Denmark gives the lie to the conservative claim that a society can have a generous welfare system or prosperity, but not both ("Great Danes," January 1–15). But Cohn fails to mention a major factor in Denmark's success. For most of its history, the Danish economy was burdened by energy dependence, which limited industrial growth and imposed a perennial trade deficit. It is no coincidence that, as Denmark's economy began to take off in the 1980s and 1990s, Danish North Sea gas and oil wells came online, making Denmark, for the first time, energy independent. While one can say that a business-friendly environment has led to the creation of new wealth in Denmark, one must also allow that the tremendous resource of North Sea gas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A MORMON IN THE WHITE HOUSE?
WHY RELIGION MATTERS
DAMON LINKER
ISAIAH BERLIN: RELIGION AND THE STATE
JONATHAN COHN: THE NEXT LIBERAL CRAZE
TOM BISSELL: MY BALTIC HEAVEN

and oil has increased Denmark's aggregate wealth, allowing the Danes to pursue social and economic policies they could not otherwise afford.

JACK M. RICE
Long Beach, California

COHN GLIDES QUICKLY OVER THE credibility problems in promoting Denmark as a neoliberal, utopian model for the United States. He describes it as "a small, ethnically homogeneous country." To a reader in the United States, which has a multiethnic population of nearly 300 million, this sounds like Germany. But the population of Denmark, unmentioned in the article, is approximately 5.5 million. You cannot extrapolate a country of only 5.5 million as a serious model for the United States. Denmark is not a "large" welfare state—because it is not a large state. There is no broad lesson here. If we're going to look to puny countries for our utopian vision, let's also consider the city-state of Singapore. With a population of 4.5 million and a per capita GDP of $30,900 (versus $37,000 for Denmark), Singapore's unemployment was 3.1 percent in 2006, with a growth rate of 7.4 percent. There's a 92.5 percent literacy rate, home ownership is 91.7 percent, and the savings rate has long been among the world's highest. And, unlike homogeneous Denmark, Singapore is successfully multiracial, with Indians and Malays living in harmony with the majority Chinese. Singapore embraces capitalism. In contrast to Denmark's 68 percent top tax rate for individuals, Singapore's is only 21 percent, and this doesn't trigger until you make about $200,000. Corporate tax rates are also low. Yet Singapore's policies ensure its citizens are well-educated, own their own homes, and retire well. Alas, it is not a democracy, but a benevolent police state with no tolerance for political dissent or for crime, drugs, and pornography. So one man's utopia may be another man's hell. While I should think we could learn something from both Denmark and Singapore, I only say this to be polite. I'd rather live in the United States, at least until we become a dreary nanny state. Has Robert Rubin moved to Denmark yet?

ALAN COON
Los Angeles, California

JONATHAN COHN RESPONDS:
It's true Denmark has easy access to North Sea petroleum, but, if that disqualifies it from a discussion of successful economies, then the same should apply to other countries blessed with natural resources—including the United States. It's also true that Denmark is a small, homogeneous country, which is why I pointedly warned readers not to

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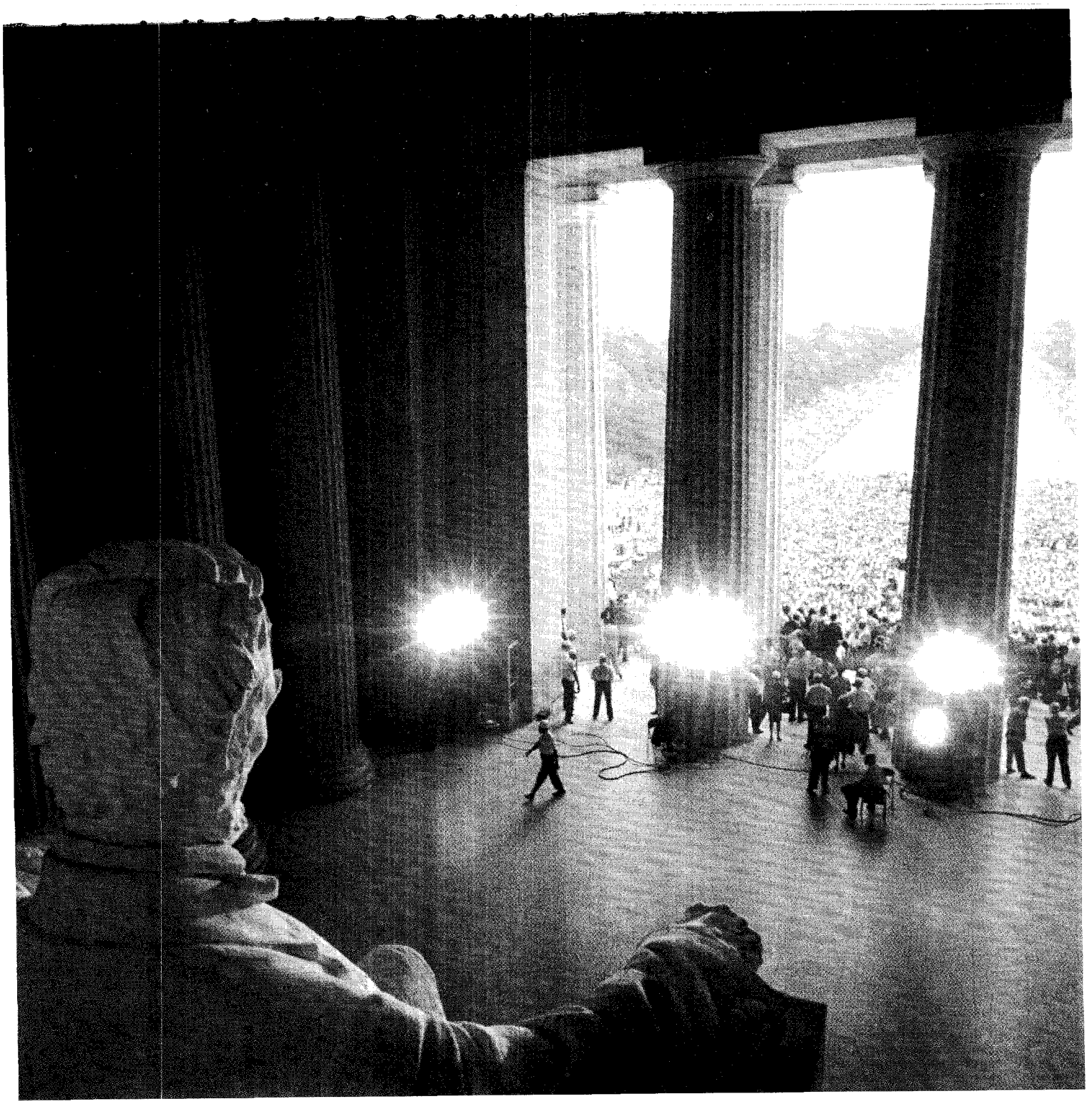

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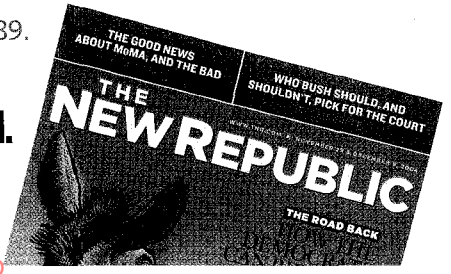

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Ladies' Choice

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

LAST WEEK, I ARGUED THAT Barack Obama could be elected president partly because he defies white people's stereotypes of blacks ("Black Like Me," February 5). As it happens, I think Hillary Clinton is electable, too, but partly for the opposite reason: because she *confirms* people's stereotypes of women.

Let me explain. The research on female electability is surprisingly rosy. As the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Kathleen Dolan put it in a 2006 paper for the Midwest Political Science Association, "A significant body of work demonstrates that women candidates are just as successful as similarly situated men." Of course, women are still woefully underrepresented in gubernatorial mansions and in Congress, but that's not because they don't win; it's mostly because they don't run. The reasons are complex: Women have greater family responsibilities (many don't run until their children are grown, which gives them less time to climb the electoral ladder), party leaders are less likely to recruit women, and women are more likely to doubt their own qualifications for office. For the health of American democracy, these are important concerns. But not for Clinton in 2008: She's already in.

That's the good news. Here's the problem. The evidence suggests that Americans are slightly less willing to elect women to executive offices than to legislative ones, perhaps because of deep-seated stereotypes about women's leadership abilities. No one knows for sure, since there have been so few serious female presidential candidates, but those stereotypes could be a bigger obstacle when it comes to the highest executive office in the land. And, most worrisome of all, they could be a *much* bigger obstacle in a time of war.

Just ask Jennifer Lawless. A couple of years ago, the Brown University political scientist looked at survey data from August and September 2002. As she noted in a subsequent paper for *Political Research Quarterly*, the percentage of Americans saying they would vote for a qualified woman for president had been going up and up—from more than 80 percent in the 1980s to almost 95 percent by the late '90s. But, according to her data, gathered a year after September 11, it plummeted to 65 percent. When Lawless investigated further, she found the reason: As people turned their attention to terrorism and war, they prioritized characteristics (self-confidence, assertiveness, aggressiveness) that they associated with men and devalued those (compassion, sensitivity, compromise) that they associated with women. That was particularly bad news for female Democrats, since people tend to associate the party with those same feminine traits—meaning that female Democratic candidates are perceived as doubly soft.

It wasn't only the new national security focus that hurt women. It was the newly hawkish mood. The more aggressive a person's foreign policy views, Lawless noted, the more likely he or she was to support men. A subsequent study by Johns Hopkins University's Erika Falk and the University of Arizona's Kate Kenski reached the same conclusion, finding that people who backed the Iraq war were 30 points more likely to prefer a generic male presidential candidate, while those who opposed it were seven points more likely to favor a woman. September 11, in other words, upended the conventional wisdom about women and electability. "We know, then, only that women are as likely as men to win elections when domestic policy and issues on which women are perceived as the stereotypical experts occupy the political agenda," wrote Lawless. But in wartime? "A woman in the White House? Probably not."

Had Clinton been running for president against John McCain in 2002 or 2004, in other words, she would have faced a serious gender disadvantage. But what Lawless couldn't foresee was how radically the nation's mood would shift. Today, national security remains a dominant issue, but only because President Bush won't heed the public's desire to get out of Iraq. In growing numbers, Americans have not only turned against the war, they have turned against hawkishness in general. The share of the public that says the United States should increase its military presence overseas has dropped from almost one-half in 2002 to less than one-third in 2006. According to an October 2006 study by the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes, 65 percent of Americans think the Bush administration has been too militaristic, while 67 percent say it should focus more on diplomacy. "Americans perceive that the primary lesson of the September 11th attacks," declared the study, "is that the United States needs to cooperate more with other countries."

Americans want a foreign policy that is more cooperative, more sensitive, and less aggressive—exactly the qualities they associate with women. Not coincidentally, the percentage of Americans who say they will vote for a female presidential candidate has returned to roughly 90 percent. And the approval ratings for John McCain—the contender most associated with an aggressive, ultra-tough foreign policy—have crashed. A February 2006 poll found that, when asked whether a man or a woman would do a better job as commander-in-chief, respondents were evenly split. And, when asked who would do a better job on foreign policy, the hypothetical female candidate led by eight points. It stands to reason. If voters who oppose the Iraq war remain more likely to support female candidates, as they were several years ago, that's good news for Clinton, because there are a lot more of them now.

That's ironic, of course, given that Clinton supported the war. Once upon a time, appearing hawkish seemed central to her electoral viability. Today, that hawkishness could be her greatest liability in a primary campaign against Obama and John Edwards, both of whom are running to her left on foreign policy. But, if she wins the nomination, gender stereotypes may come to her aid. Research shows that female candidates—especially Democratic ones—are perceived as more liberal than they really are. In Clinton's case in 2008, that may be good news. She may find it easier to run as an antiwar candidate because that is how people are predisposed to see her. Ever since she entered the U.S. Senate, Clinton has been trying to overcome people's ingrained perceptions. Now she must hope she hasn't succeeded too well.

PETER BEINART

Peter Beinart is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

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Funeral Surge

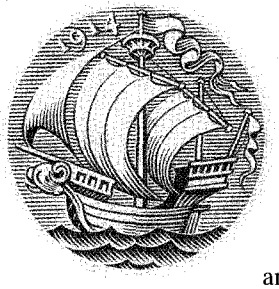
When George W. Bush set out to sell his surge, he never imagined that he would need to convince the plan's intellectual authors of its wisdom. But, a week after Bush delivered his State of the Union address, the American Enterprise Institute's Frederick Kagan began furiously distancing himself from the escalation. "This is not our plan," he told *Salon*. His writing partner, former Army Vice Chief of Staff Jack Keane, informed the Senate Armed Services Committee, "[I]t makes no sense to me." It's not just the president's wonk base that has fled. Republican senators have begun looking more like the defeated Republican Guard, melting into the Democratic opposition. Bush's prime-time defense of his escalation policy was followed by five new Republican draft resolutions opposing it.

So who in Washington actually believes this surge will work? Apparently, the one man who still believes in Mission Accomplished. We speak, of course, of Dick Cheney. A day after the State of the Union, he sat down with CNN's Wolf Blitzer for a remarkably feisty interview. When Blitzer mentioned the broad consensus that the administration had bungled its Iraq policy, the vice president dismissed such talk as "hogwash." In fact, he said, "Bottom line is that we've had enormous successes, and we will continue to have enormous successes." He denied that Iraq was a "terrible situation." For a man with such a supposedly dark worldview, he is awfully cheery.

This isn't spin applied to make the best of a bad situation. Cheney has repeated his optimistic take on Iraq so often that you can't doubt his belief in it. And, therefore, he properly qualifies as a delusional individual. Now, Cheney may or may not be the most influential man in the White House these days. But his assumptions about Iraq continue to hold sway. Despite their plans for an escalation, administration officials fail to grasp the scale of our problem in Iraq—or its urgency. There's a reason why the plan has virtually no defenders outside the president's chain of command.

For the last week, Cheney and Bush have defended the plan by placing the onus on its critics. "Those who refuse to give this plan a chance to work have an obligation to offer an alternative that has a better chance for success," Bush has argued. This is, to borrow Cheney's phrase, hogwash.

But, OK, here's an alternative: Stop making things worse. It's now clear that the Maliki government is not going to unify the country; it's interested in U.S. participation only to the extent that it can turn our Armed Forces into an instrument of sectarian warfare. Our military must get out of the business of helping Shia death squads—a business in which the surge will only implicate us more deeply.



Does this mean we have no further military role in Iraq? No, it does not. We have a strong interest in staying to fight Al Qaeda, and we have a powerful responsibility to mitigate ethnic slaughter and protect Iraqi refugees as the civil war deepens.

There is, for that reason, something unsettling about Democratic rhetoric at this juncture. While the vast bulk of the Democrats' proposals are reasonable—benchmarks for the Iraqi government, a renewed focus on battling Al Qaeda—some of their speechifying is less than appealing. Hillary Clinton says she "resents" that Bush's successor will inherit his mess; Barack Obama talks about letting Iraqis tackle their own problems; every other presidential candidate decries the continued Iraqi dependency on the United States. They may be right to disdain Bush and his war. But they are also evading America's moral responsibility for the fate of the country we invaded. We set events in motion, and now there are ethnic groups that depend on our protection from catastrophes that will follow our withdrawal. Some of these catastrophes may be inevitable. But that doesn't justify throwing up our hands—or rhetoric that raises public expectations of an easy and guilt-free withdrawal.

The current swirl of binding and nonbinding congressional resolutions is hardly satisfying. But this glut of legislation was born of desperation. The Bush administration continues to push ahead on its course in spite of public opinion, congressional consensus, and bloody reality. These resolutions may be the only vehicles for sending a message to the obstreperous bunch in the White House. And, even when the surge happens, these resolutions could help lay important political groundwork for foisting a new strategy on the White House in the future. Sooner or later, even for Dick Cheney, reality must intrude. ■

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The Resolutionary War. Get In Line

BY EVE FAIRBANKS

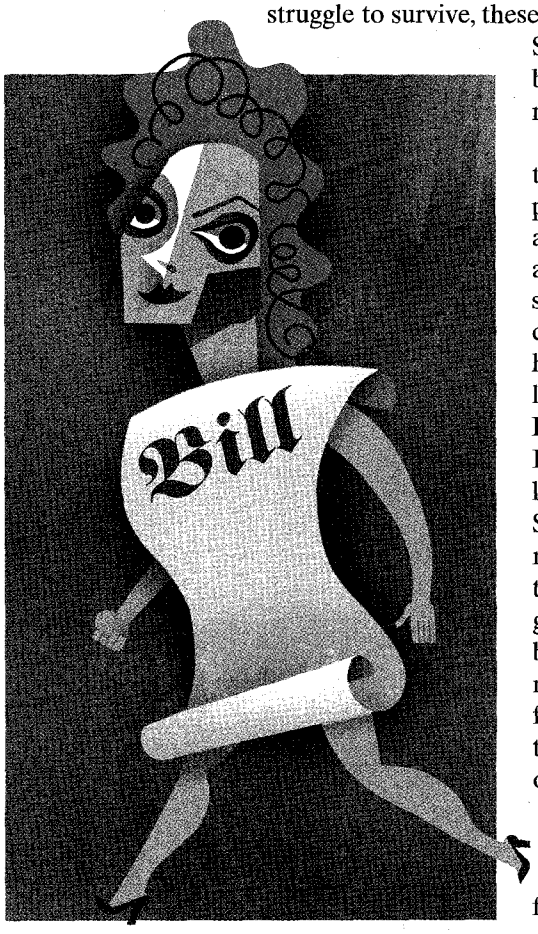
LAST SATURDAY, DEMOCRATIC Representative Jerrold Nadler of New York mounted the stage at the antiwar rally on the Mall. Though he doesn't sit on the relevant committees, he'd just introduced a gutsy bill in the House to cut off funds for Bush's "surge" and begin withdrawal from Iraq, and he was hoping to present it to the crowd. But, sadly, the rally's organizers had chosen Representatives Dennis Kucinich, Lynn Woolsey, and Maxine Waters, who also have Iraq bills, to speak instead. Wearing a two-button blazer accessorized with a brown accordion folder that gave him more the look of an airline executive than a peace activist, Nadler lumbered up onto the dais anyway, where an eager buddy shoved him forward. "Hey, give him a shout! He has—a bill," the rally's emcee said. Then she ceded the microphone to the next speaker, leaving Nadler to mill about awkwardly on the stage amid a glowering Jesse Jackson, the lawmakers who were actually speaking, a coffin, and the ragged, ill-dressed members of the protest's house band.

It's a brutally competitive world out there for Democratic representatives with ideas on Iraq. Even though the leadership has decided to let the Senate make the first move (which will be a nonbinding resolution condemning Bush's plans), Iraq is a hot and fertile topic, and bills are sprouting in the House like mushrooms. Many of them seem, at first glance, strangely redundant: H.R. 508 calls for a full redeployment (within six months)—as do H.R. 455 (by December 31), H.J. Res. 18 ("at the earliest practicable date"), and H.R. 413 ("in a safe and orderly manner"). But the market is not yet saturated. Several other representatives, including Steve Israel of New York and James McGovern of Massachusetts, are considering putting out their own. "There's gonna be more," says a Democratic aide with a sigh.

Why are so many Iraq bills flourishing? The atmosphere on the Hill is one of the freest for Democrats in memory: Many are experiencing being in the majority for the first time, and they're stretching their arms and whipping out the plans that had lain dormant under Republican rule. "Maybe [these bill-producing congressmen] had ideas before and their staff was like, 'No.' And now they're like, 'We can't stop them!' " explains an aide to a representative with a bill.

But this brood of bills is about to undergo a fierce round of natural selection. Though there is growing consensus within the Democratic caucus that Bush's foreign policy has been a total disaster—in an incredible show of unity, a nonbinding resolution will probably pass unanimously among Democrats in both houses—there is no consensus over what to do about it. For the more aggressive bills—the ones that go beyond symbolic condemnation and actually try to change the course of events in Iraq—a host of threats stand between them and survival, from dissatisfied antiwar groups to bloodthirsty Republicans. But the Democrats' own leadership may be the cruelest predator of all.

A FEW DAYS before the rally, a horde of cameramen and gossip reporters crammed into California Representative Lynn Woolsey's office to see the radiantly bronzed Susan Sarandon, squeezed nearly into Woolsey's lap on the congresswoman's small couch. Sarandon was there to promo the Iraq bill put out by Woolsey, Waters, and Barbara Lee: As competing bills struggle to survive, these representatives were hoping that Sarandon would give legs to their bill so it would crawl out of the muck and walk in the sunlight.



There are people overseeing intelligent design in this evolution process, after all, and buzz can make a difference. Most of the Iraq bills aren't gunning to be passed as they stand—Bush's veto power precludes that. Rather, their designers hope they will be selected as the lucky ones incorporated into the House Democrats' future major Iraq legislation—which will most likely be Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Jack Murtha's rewrite of the supplemental budget the administration delivers to Congress next week. Forget the nonbinding: It's the money that really matters. And there are a million different tricks Murtha could add to the budget bill: Timelines. Cutting off funds for new deployments. Conditioning the funds on the scheduling of something like a peace conference. Benchmarks for the Iraqi army. (Benchmarks are

DAVID COWLES

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"all the rage" right now, reports a Democratic leadership aide.) By creating a budget with money the president will have to sign for and conditions he will inevitably ignore, Murtha could even force a balance-of-powers constitutional clash that might go to the Supreme Court.

But the political atmosphere that surrounds all these options is, as hard-charging freshman Representative Steve Cohen puts it, "touchy." Make that noxious, as moderates and progressives battle over whether to touch funding. So the bills are trying out specific, even miniscule, tweaks in substance and rhetoric to see what flies with enough people to make it into a final proposal for the whole caucus: Does the word "redeployment" go over better than "withdrawal"? How soon is too soon?

As SARANDON SEDUCED the lenses, I met Nadler outside the House chamber. Nadler believes Congress must limit the president's war funding, but he also worries that such a move is a political liability: "No body armor. No undies. No ammunition," he explains. "That's a politically deadly image." So he expressly designed a bill to "shift the rhetoric": specifically, to strongly emphasize the word "protect." Bush's Iraq budget will be limited except for funds needed for "the protection of the United States Armed Forces"; its title is the "Protect the Troops and Bring Them Home Act of 2007." Nadler has been talking to Murtha, trying to persuade him that "protect" might be the key to overcoming the concerns that divide the caucus.

But the most severe threat to Nadler's bill, as well as the others, may be that the Democratic leadership exhibits little sense of urgency. Murtha's committee won't deal with the supplemental until at least early March. Meanwhile, the war goes on. The troops for the surge—the deployment of which a number of House bills, including Nadler's, prohibit—board planes for Baghdad. Frustrated, Woolsey has talked to colleagues about sending a letter to Caucus Chair Rahm Emanuel begging him to let members debate Iraq strategy at this week's Democratic House retreat in Williamsburg.

It may be that the leadership's stately pace on Iraq is ingeniously calculated to bring more Republicans on board, a task akin to coaxing wounded, skittish horses into a corral. But some trying to stop the new deployments have a different explanation, one they claim they've discerned from members of the leadership: Go slow, and Republicans will continue to be held responsible for Iraq as it sinks further and further into chaos. "The question is, how far do you let [Bush] go out on his own before the Congress activates its responsibilities?" says an aide to a Democrat sponsoring a bill to prevent the surge. Letting him go out as far as possible may waste the powers of the new majority—but it has its political advantages. "The thinking is," continues the aide, " 'Let it be George Bush's disaster, and we can reap the benefits in 2008.' " "The Republicans own this thing right now," even Nadler admits. "The temptation is there." ■

John McCain's hatchet man. Smelly Nelly

BY CONOR CLARKE

IN THE SUMMER of 2004, when the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth attacked John Kerry with a series of ads challenging his service in Vietnam, the hapless candidate had a defender across the aisle: John McCain. Shortly after the ads hit the airwaves, the Arizona senator called the smear campaign "dishonest and dishonorable" and urged President Bush to condemn it. McCain made no secret of his motives: "It was the same kind of deal that was pulled on me," he fumed in an August interview, referring to the 2000 South Carolina primary, when Bush supporters had spread a notorious rumor that McCain had fathered a black child. McCain had lost the state, and his 2000 candidacy lost its momentum.

But, these days, McCain seems to have achieved a Zen-like peace with the past. After all, last March his presidential exploratory committee hired Terry Nelson. As national political director for George W. Bush's 2004 reelection campaign, where he managed the much-admired (and much-envied) get-out-the-vote effort, Nelson is a certifiable catch. But he also regularly produces—right down to the racial undertones—the kind of campaign hatchetry that used to make McCain, by his own admission, "really angry." Nelson hasn't exactly given up his old tactics since boarding the Straight Talk Express, either: In September, *The Washington Post* reported that the Republican National Committee (RNC) had enlisted Nelson to run an ad campaign that would present the "best of the worst" in opposition research. He didn't disappoint. A few weeks later, Nelson's operation produced a now-infamous ad targeting Tennessee senatorial candidate Harold Ford Jr. The spot featured a scantily clad white woman reporting that she met Ford, who is black, at "the *Playboy* party" and urging him to give her a call. The fallout was bad enough that no less an ethical paragon than Wal-Mart, which also had a contract with Nelson, cut its ties with the consultant soon after the ad's release.

The Ford ad was the latest notch on a well-scarred bedpost. Over the past 15 years, Nelson has made an art of aggressive campaigning—and that's led to his name surfacing in relation to some of the most spectacularly embarrassing Republican scandals of the decade, including Tom DeLay's Texas money-laundering escapades and the 2002 New Hampshire phone-jamming conspiracy, in which GOP operatives executed a scheme to jam phones Democrats were

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using to get out the vote. But, despite his yen for campaign finance reform and clean politics, McCain has so far been willing to overlook Nelson's unsavory past—and even his more recent mudslinging. In fact, he promoted him: A month after the Ford ad ran, McCain chose Nelson to manage his presidential campaign.

In 1992, two years before the Iowa native finished college, Nelson was already running a congressional campaign for Iowa Representative Jim Nussle. In 1995, after he managed Nussle's 1994 reelection, his skills caught the attention of Ed Brookover, then political director of the National Republican Congressional Campaign (NRCC), who hired him as a field representative. Four years later, Brookover left to pursue private consulting, and Nelson was the obvious choice for a replacement. "I sure recommended him," says Brookover. It's not hard to see why. "You can always expect [Nelson] to go on the attack," remembers David Nagle, a former Iowa representative who ran against Nussle in 1992 and 1994. "He does not win on the virtues of his candidate. He wins on the supposed sins of his opponent." (Nagle should know: During the 1994 campaign, a Nussle ad falsely claimed that he "did not pay one penny" in employee payroll taxes.)

By the 2002 election, Nelson was deputy chief of staff for the RNC, overseeing many of the day-to-day regional operations for the election, including those of the New England director, James Tobin. By Nelson's own account, the most important state in Tobin's region was New Hampshire, which had one of the most ferociously contested Senate races in the country. Tobin, along with several employees of the state party, developed a plan to ensure victory: They hired a telemarketing company to repeatedly call phones that Democrats were using on Election Day for a get-out-the-vote operation in order to tie up the lines and interfere with their efforts. The Republican candidate, John Sununu, won by almost 20,000 votes. But, three months later, the Manchester *Union Leader* uncovered the rudiments of the plot. Four people, including Tobin, have since been convicted and sentenced in connection with the scheme, and, in late November, the RNC settled a civil suit brought by the New Hampshire Democrats for $150,000.

For his part, Nelson testified at his civil deposition that he "doesn't recall any specific recollections" of discussing the phone-jamming incident with Tobin, and he told the FBI that he could not remember who informed him of it. But Tobin was supposed to be reporting directly to Nelson, and phone records made public during his trial show that Tobin made at least five calls to the RNC's campaign headquarters on the day the jamming took place. Tobin and Nelson are also old friends. According to Nelson's own deposition in the civil case, he hired Tobin at the RNC, the NRCC, and to work on the 2004 Bush campaign. And they remain close. "It's something the Department of Justice should continue to look into," says Paul Twomey, who served as co-counsel for the New Hampshire Democrats. "Do I think Nelson was behind it? No. Do I think he knew something before law enforcement did? That's more likely."

If Nelson's involvement in the phone-jamming scandal remains circumstantial, his involvement in the Tom DeLay money-laundering scheme—the type of ethical lapse that is supposed to infuriate the reform-minded McCain—is blissfully simple: When Tom DeLay and his buddies allegedly wanted to launder money, they went straight to Nelson.

In the run-up to the 2002 election, DeLay and the heads of his PACs conspired to circumvent Texas state law—which prohibits corporate donations to state legislative candidates—by passing the money through the RNC. DeLay had pushed for an aggressive new redistricting scheme that led to GOP control in the Texas House of Representatives, and he wanted the same result in the Senate. So, according to the criminal indictment, a DeLay associate named Jim Ellis got in touch with Nelson and proposed that, in exchange for an equivalent sum, the RNC make contributions to the candidates that the Hammer wanted to back. A few days later, Ellis sent Nelson a wish list "that contained the names of several candidates for the Texas House of Representatives," along with a check for $190,000. Early the following month, the RNC sent checks of $20,000 to $40,000 to each of the seven candidates on Ellis's list.

Despite playing a starring role in the exchange, Nelson wasn't indicted along with Ellis and DeLay. Stan Brand, a former general counsel to the House Democrats and an expert on campaign finance law, lists several reasons why the Texas prosecutor might have spared Nelson. It could be that there isn't enough evidence to obtain a conviction. It could be that the prosecution doesn't want to damage a potentially cooperative individual. Or it could be that Nelson is enough of a small fry that time and resources are better spent taking down DeLay. (The prosecutor in the case declined to comment.) But, despite his lack of an indictment, Nelson, who testified at the grand jury proceeding, looms large in virtually every document related to the case. And, since a government witness list has not yet been created, he could still be called to testify at the trial.

Sadly, the prospect of John McCain's campaign manager on the stand in the biggest campaign finance criminal trial in history is not an irony that McCain's office seems to appreciate. Straight Talk America has refused to answer virtually any question related to Nelson's history, much less make him available for comment. McCain, for his part, has been asked publicly about Nelson only a few times. When Don Imus prodded the senator about Nelson's connection to the Ford ad, McCain falsely claimed that Nelson had resigned from the RNC in protest. And, when asked about Nelson's connection to the DeLay case on a Seattle radio show later that month, McCain mumbled something about "those charges" being false and made the garden-variety promise to "check it out." Perhaps Terry Nelson has already taught him a thing or two about politics—his way. ■

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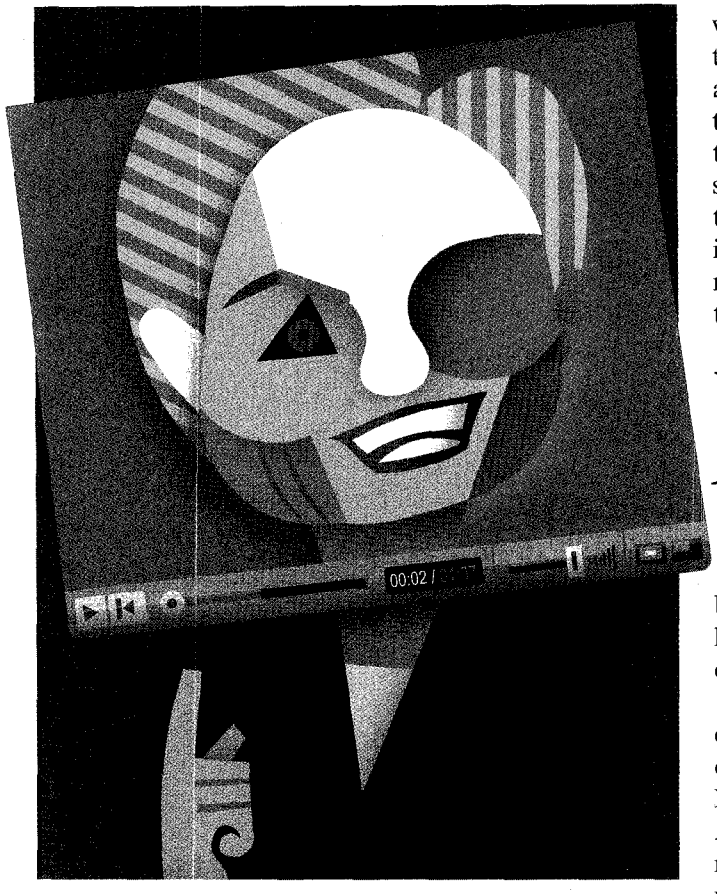
Hillary uploads charisma.

Tube Top

BY JOSHUA GREEN



HILLARY CLINTON IS known for a lot of things. Stirring oratory isn't one of them. But, if you were judging her performance strictly on crowd response, last June's appearance at the New York Democratic Party convention in Buffalo would stand out as a highlight. Clinton was there to formally accept her party's nomination for the Senate, and, because everyone understood that this formality was really her first step toward the White House, the whole place had the air of a coronation. With her husband and other luminaries arranged behind her like set pieces, Clinton conveyed herself almost perfectly. She was poised, pleasant, and hit all the right notes. Many in the hushed crowd were visibly moved by her performance.

The catch for Clinton is that the person who so impressed the audience wasn't really her—it was her image, beamed onto a giant screen. That image appeared in an 18-minute video put together by her media adviser, Mandy Grunwald, which chronicled her five and a half years in the Senate and was gilded with testimonials from firefighters, veterans, grateful mothers, even her husband. And this created a rather awkward contrast with what happened next: When the lights came up and the real Clinton finally spoke, all her liabilities as a public speaker were on full display. Her speech was an uneasy, clanging call-and-response that began with the mantra "I believe" (as in, "I believe in the dignity of work," "I believe in individual responsibility") and ended with the refrain "Stand with me" ("Stand with me as I fight to revitalize American manufacturing," "Stand with me against the wrong-headed, shortsighted foreign policies of this administration," and so on). It aimed to be a soaring call to arms, but, when the audience heeded her final call to stand, the ovation was strictly pro forma. Perhaps sensing this, Clinton disappeared, leaving her husband to plunge into the crowd. You couldn't help but suspect that she had made the right choice: At least on this day, the virtual Clinton seemed much more appealing than the real one.

MORE OBVIOUSLY THAN most candidates, Clinton has always relied on packaging and presentation. Just as with last year's speech, the rollout for her first Senate run in 2000 was built around an elaborately produced, and somewhat mawkish, video that used black-and-white childhood stills to "soften" the controversial candidate—this one produced by Harry Thomason and Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, longtime friends of the Clintons and the duo behind the sitcoms "Designing Women" and "Evening Shade."

In previous election cycles, the need to substitute such creations for authenticity would have been viewed as a considerable weakness. But a lot has changed since Buffalo. Not long after Clinton's speech, Virginia Senator George Allen, who, for all his defects, has a good deal more charisma than she does, self-combusted when his "macaca" slur was uploaded to YouTube and ricocheted all over the Web. Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman (in the primary) and ex–Montana Senator Conrad Burns (in the general) were two other casualties of Internet video and its sudden power to affect campaigns. As a result, political types came to regard YouTube primarily as a growing danger that threatened to destroy candidates in a single, fatal, worst moment. "It is a continuation of a trend in which politicians have to assume they are on live TV all the time," Howard Wolfson, one of Clinton's senior strategists, complained last year. "You can't get away with making an offensive or dumb remark and assume it won't get out."

But Clinton has just demonstrated how Web video can be used to launch a candidacy rather than snuff one out. On the Saturday morning before Bush's State of the Union address, without any advance notice, the latest Grunwald-produced video epic poured into e-mail inboxes everywhere. Clinton wasn't the first to declare her candidacy over the Internet; Barack Obama had done so several days

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earlier. But Obama's offering was sparse and poorly lit: He appeared to be shadowed by slatted window blinds, like a Mickey Spillane gumshoe. It didn't matter much, since Obama's rapturous public image could scarcely be improved and his charisma is more than evident in public appearances. Clinton, who has neither advantage, needed more help from the Web. And she got it, in the form of an announcement video that was a marvel of technical and political proficiency: warmly lit, softly focused, and shot in her own home, whose mullioned French doors and brocaded pillows suggested the approachable elegance and tasteful authority of a prelapsarian Martha Stewart, as did the candidate herself. "Our goal was to figure out how we could talk to people in the most direct and personal way about the big decision she's made," Grunwald explains.

By announcing via the Web, Clinton ensured that only her best face would be amplified. And, rather than launching out on the campaign trail, she followed up with a three-night series of online "conversations" in which regular folks could e-mail questions for her to answer in Web-video broadcasts. These, too, aimed to create the impression of eagerness to interact with the masses—but they were carefully vetted by her staff to ensure that nothing uncomfortable slipped through.

In her first week of candidacy, then, Clinton managed to avoid a single spontaneous moment, thereby eliminating any risk of a campaign-killing gaffe or, for that matter, even a minor misstep. Yet her announcement and the first leg of her campaign still wound up all over the Web—and, in the absence of any alternative access to the candidate, they were rebroadcast all over television, as she and her handlers surely knew they would be. By putting technology to clever use, she turned the handicap of her reliance on talented consultants into an asset and debunked the notion that Web video is inherently dangerous to politicians. In effect, she became the first post-YouTube candidate.

NOT EVERYONE HAS been swept away by Hillary 2.0, of course. In a press release last week, the Republican National Committee charged, not inaccurately, that Clinton's "conversations" were "short, screened, and seemingly scripted" and highlighted some of the pabulum they yielded: her favorite movies (*Out of Africa*, *Casablanca*, *The Wizard of Oz*), her favorite football team (the Chicago Bears), her love of long walks. Bloggers and reporters were left grumbling that the tough questions they'd submitted about the war hadn't made it through the staff filter—which seemed to be the whole point of the exercise. "What she's doing is practicing defensive politics in the same way that doctors practice defensive medicine," John Brabender, a Republican consultant and one of the party's most creative ad-makers, told me.

But the Clinton camp could not be more thrilled. When I caught up with Peter Daou, the Internet director for Clinton's exploratory campaign, he dismissed the bloggers' complaints and proudly directed me to the popular website Yahoo! Answers, where a question Clinton recently posted about how to fix health care had just eclipsed one posed by Oprah Winfrey in the number of "answers" it yielded. "That really sums up the level of interest and excitement about her on the Internet," Daou raved, proceeding to rattle off statistics on just how many supporters had signed up (150,000), written in (50,000), and asked questions of the candidate (25,000). "The Internet is a tremendous tool for us."

Indeed, Clinton's nascent candidacy, in particular, seems favored by the new norms of Web politics, which offer the appearance of intimacy without the risk and mitigate an uninspiring style by making it possible for voters, with the help of consultants, to simply download the missing element of emotional connection the same way you might add a plug-in to your Internet browser.

Still, Clinton's virtual self can only get her so far—eventually the real Hillary has to take the podium. When she finally appeared in Iowa last week, her reception was only middling. And, when her performance faltered, nobody could yell, "Cut!" ■

Uninevitable Clinton.

Steep Hill

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

THERE ALMOST SEEMS to be a conspiracy dedicated to convincing us that Hillary Clinton is the inevitable Democratic nominee for president. She's certainly made the inevitability of her victory her primary campaign theme. (Her announcement began, "I'm in. And I'm in to win.") The press regularly suggests she'll win. (*The Washington Post*: "Clinton begins the long campaign as the clear front-runner for the Democratic nomination.") Even her most bitter enemies, giving voice to their horror fantasies, say it. (*The Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page: "The race is between Hillary Rodham Clinton and everybody else.")

But is Clinton really the front-runner for the nomination? Only if you look about one inch deep. So, before we cancel the primaries in deference to her inevitability, perhaps it's worth exploring how this odd bit of conventional wisdom came into circulation.

The favorite piece of data cited by the Clinton-is-inevitable crowd is a group of national polls showing her with a commanding lead among Democrats. Some recent surveys show her as the favorite by about 20 percentage points; others show a smaller but still impressive lead.

But national surveys, especially this early in the process, tend to sweep up the lightly held opinions of voters who are paying scant attention to the race, and, as such, they are lit-

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tle more than name-recognition contests. At this point in 2003, after all, polls consistently showed Joe Lieberman leading the Democratic pack. This, of course, merely reflected the fact that he had been the vice presidential nominee three years earlier. When Democratic voters started really paying attention to the race—and to Lieberman—his numbers started going south and never stopped.

But the parallel between Lieberman and Clinton runs even deeper. If you go back and read what campaign reporters were writing four years ago, they all assumed Lieberman would enjoy massive black support owing to his role in the 2000 Florida primary fiasco, which offended black Democrats far more than white ones. The same assumption now seems to hold for Clinton and black voters, with impeachment taking the place of Florida as the defining confrontation that supposedly sealed the eternal loyalty of that constituency. But the far more plausible analysis is that black voters are disproportionately poor, and therefore less likely to spend a lot of time following political news, and therefore (like all low-intensity voters) prone to giving pollsters the name of the best-known candidate. As the election approaches and they tune in more carefully, their choices, like those of the electorate generally, could easily change. (If you have a short memory, I'll remind you that no, Joe Lieberman did not enjoy a massive wave of black support when the primaries arrived.)

So national polls don't mean much right now. A more accurate (though still imperfect) gauge is polls in early primary states. Why are they more accurate? First, because voters in those states tend to focus on the race earlier than elsewhere. And, second, because their verdict has massive ripple effects elsewhere. Think about the 2004 Iowa primary, which singlehandedly destroyed the Howard Dean juggernaut and vaulted John Kerry, long confined to also-ran status, into the lead across the country.

In these polls, by contrast, Clinton is far from the undisputed favorite. Polls in New Hampshire show her slightly trailing Barack Obama. One recent poll in Iowa had Clinton running fourth, about ten points behind front-runner John Edwards. Whoever wins in these early states is probably going to win the nomination, and, right now, Clinton, while certainly in the thick of it, is hardly running away with the race.

In a memo published the day she announced her candidacy, Clinton pollster Mark Penn offered up a rebuttal to this inconvenient fact. Clinton, he argued, is bound to rise in the early primary states as she spends more time there. But other candidates will be spending more time in Iowa and New Hampshire, too. The question is: Which candidate is more likely to benefit from endless hours of speechifying, hand-shaking, and town hall meetings? There's no reason to think the answer will be Clinton. While she may be just as smart as—and more experienced than—Edwards and Obama, she is an average orator, while Edwards is a very good one and Obama is a brilliant one. Having seen all three give speeches, it's hard for me to imagine how a prolonged side-by-side comparison will move voters into Clinton's camp. And, as the best-known of the leading candidates, she'll have the hardest time making a strong new impression anyway.

IF CLINTON'S ONLY problem were her mediocre communications skills, she might still be in great shape. (John Kerry, Al Gore, and Michael Dukakis weren't exactly William Jennings Bryan out there.) Unfortunately, she has several other weaknesses, which are mutually reinforcing and quite possibly fatal.

Weakness number one is that many Democrats—especially, but not exclusively, moderate ones—see her as a bad bet to win a general election. The bill of particulars is that she's culturally polarizing, irreparably damaged by a decade and a half of conservative attacks, and vulnerable to sexist fears about a female commander-in-chief during wartime. Since 2000, Clinton has addressed this vulnerability in numerous ways: She has rhetorically wooed cultural conservatives on issues like abortion and flag-burning, and she has staked out hawkish terrain on foreign policy, endorsing the Iraq war and refusing to repudiate her vote authorizing force.

Despite all that, concerns about her electability remain. Penn points to some polls showing her leading John McCain in a trial match-up. But this is hardly reassuring. General public support for the Democratic Party is higher than at any time in recent memory. Asked which party it would rather see win the White House in 2008, the public chose Democrats by a staggering 20-point margin. So the fact that a couple of polls show Clinton slightly ahead of McCain, while other polls show her trailing, in fact bodes very ill for her general election prospects. Moreover, some of the polls that show her trailing likely Republican nominees show Edwards and/or Obama leading, despite their lower name recognition.

Meanwhile, the moves Clinton has made to placate the political center have enraged the left. That's weakness number two. The left wing of the Democratic Party has always been alienated from her husband, and, naturally, she has borne the brunt of that alienation. But her feints to the center—and, above all, Iraq—have stoked that alienation into hot fury. In the most recent straw poll on the liberal blog *DailyKos*, she pulled in an anemic 4 percent of the vote. (For comparison, Dennis Kucinich and Bill Richardson each drew 5 percent.) Liberal bloggers may not be perfectly representative of liberal voters in general, or even liberal

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activists in general, but they do represent a genuine grassroots sentiment, which is why massive blogger excitement about Howard Dean foreshadowed his vault to the top of the Democratic pack.

The thing that most infuriates the left is Clinton's refusal to repudiate her war vote, as Edwards has done. "She hasn't done the sort of ritual 'You were right and I was wrong' statement about her original vote on Iraq," notes Democratic Leadership Council senior fellow Ed Kilgore. But there's a good reason why she hasn't done this—namely, that it would cause massive hemorrhaging to her personal image, which is weakness number three. Clinton's opponents have, for the most part successfully, painted her as a soulless schemer. This image, fair or not, has long since penetrated the popular consciousness: A recent "Saturday Night Live" skit portrayed her declaring, "I think most Democrats know me. They understand that my support for the war was always insincere."

Taken together, these three weaknesses look like an inescapable vise. Anything she does to placate the center alienates the left. Anything she does to placate the left alienates the center. And, if she tries any clever, please-everybody Clintonian positioning, she alienates everybody. Is it impossible she'll nonetheless find a way to win the nomination? No, but it's a far cry from inevitable. ■

The madness of King George.

Tyran-a-Soros

BY MARTIN PERETZ

GEORGE SOROS LUNCHED with some reporters on Saturday at Davos. He talked about spending $600 million on civil society projects during the 1990s, then trying to cut back to $300 million, and how this year it will be between $450 and $500 million. His new projects aim, in Floyd Norris's words, to promote a "common European foreign policy" (read: an anti-American foreign policy) and also to study the integration (or so he thinks) of Muslims in eleven European cities. He included among his dicta a little slight at Bill and Melinda Gates, who "have chosen public health, which is like apple pie." And then, after saying the United States was now recognizing the errors it made in Iraq, he added this comment, as reported by Norris in *The New York Times*' online "Davos Diary": "To what extent it recognizes the mistake will determine its future." Soros said Turkey and Japan were still hurt by a reluctance to admit to dark parts of their history and contrasted that reluctance to Germany's rejection of its Nazi-era past. "America needs to follow the policies it has introduced in Germany. We have to go through a certain de-Nazification process."

No, you are not seeing things. He said *de-Nazification*. He is not saying, in the traditional manner of liberal alarmists, that the United States is now where Weimar Germany was. He is saying that the United States is now where Germany after Weimar was. Even for Davos, this was stupid. Actually, worse than stupid. There is a historical analysis, a moral claim, in Soros's word. He believes that the United States is now a Nazi country. Why else would we have to go through a "certain de-Nazification process"? I defy anybody to interpret the remark differently. The analogy between Bush's America and Hitler's Germany is not fleshed out, and one is left wondering how far he would take it. Is Bush like Hitler? If it is "de-Nazification" that we need, then in some sense Bush must be like Hitler. Was the invasion of Iraq like the invasion of Poland? Perhaps. The more one lingers over Soros's word, the more one's eyes pop from one's head. In the old days, the Amerika view of America was propagated by angry kids on their painful way to adulthood; now, it is propagated by the Maecenas of the Democratic Party.

But nobody seems to have noticed. I did not see Soros's canard reported in other places, and on the *Times*' website on the day I saw it there were only four comments. Imagine the outcry if a Republican moneybags—say, Richard Mellon Scaife—had declared that Hillary Clinton is a communist or that Bill Clinton's America had been in need of a certain de-Stalinization process. But I hear no outcry from Soros's congregation. People who were repelled by Bush's rather plausible notion of the "axis of evil" seem untroubled by Soros's imputation of even worse evil to Bush. Because Bush really is a fascist, isn't he? And Cheney, too; and Donald Rumsfeld, and Antonin Scalia, and even Joe Lieberman, right? Or so I fear too many liberals now believe. There seems to be a renaissance among liberals of the view that there are no enemies to the left. I hear no Democrats expressing embarrassment, or revulsion, at Soros's comment. Whether this silence is owed to their agreement or to their greed, it is outrageous.

But if Soros lives in a Nazi state, what does that make him? I still recall Karl Jaspers's devastating point, in *The Question of German Guilt* in 1947, that every German shares in the guilt of Hitlerism. Such guilt was not, in Jaspers's mind, an abstraction or a purely political matter. But Soros does not appear to accept any responsibility for the Nazi-like crimes he ascribes to the United States. Perhaps he thinks that, having contributed $18 million to elect John Kerry in 2004, he was an American hero, a dissident, a resistance fighter, the Grill Room's representative of the White Rose. And if, in 2008, Soros's gang comes to power, how will de-Nazification work? Whom shall we send to prison? Perhaps we should prevent everybody who voted or argued for the war from running for office. At the very least, the neocons must be brought to justice. (Maybe Ramsey Clark can represent them.)

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George Soros, father of the American plan for de-Nazification.

ROGER L. WOLLENBERG/UPI/LANDOV

WHAT MAKES SOROS'S remark even more twisted is that he himself experienced something of Nazism. He was 14 when the Nazis entered Budapest. On December 20, 1998, there appeared this exchange between Soros and Steve Kroft on "60 Minutes":

Kroft: "You're a Hungarian Jew . . ."
Soros: "Mm-hmm."
Kroft: ". . . who escaped the Holocaust . . ."
Soros: "Mm-hmm."
Kroft: ". . . by posing as a Christian."
Soros: "Right."
Kroft: "And you watched lots of people get shipped off to the death camps."
Soros: "Right. I was 14 years old. And I would say that that's when my character was made."
Kroft: "In what way?"
Soros: "That one should think ahead. One should understand that—and anticipate events and when, when one is threatened. It was a tremendous threat of evil. I mean, it was a—a very personal threat of evil."
Kroft: "My understanding is that you went . . . went out, in fact, and helped in the confiscation of property from the Jews."
Soros: "Yes, that's right. Yes."
Kroft: "I mean, that's—that sounds like an experience that would send lots of people to the psychiatric couch for many, many years. Was it difficult?"
Soros: "Not, not at all. Not at all. Maybe as a child you don't . . . you don't see the connection. But it was—it created no—no problem at all."
Kroft: "No feeling of guilt?"
Soros: "No."
Kroft: "For example, that, 'I'm Jewish, and here I am, watching these people go. I could just as easily be these, I should be there.' None of that?"
Soros: "Well, of course, . . . I could be on the other side or I could be the one from whom the thing is being taken away. But there was no sense that I shouldn't be there, because that was—well, actually, in a funny way, it's just like in the markets—that is I weren't there—of course, I wasn't doing it, but somebody else would—would—would be taking it away anyhow. And it was the—whether I was there or not, I was only a spectator, the property was being taken away. So the—I had no role in taking away that property. So I had no sense of guilt."

So this is the psychodrama that has been visited on American liberalism. We learn Soros never has nightmares. Had he been tried in a de-Nazification process for having been a young cog in the Hitlerite wheel, he would have felt that, since other people would have confiscated the same Jewish property and delivered the same deportation notices to the same doomed Jews, it was as if he hadn't done it himself. He sleeps well, while we sleep in Nazi America.

SOROS IS OSTENTATIOUSLY indifferent to his own Jewishness. He is not a believer. He has no Jewish communal ties. He certainly isn't a Zionist. He told Connie Bruck in *The New Yorker*—testily, she recounted—that "I don't deny the Jews their right to a national existence—but I don't want to be part of it." But he has involved himself in the founding of an anti-AIPAC, more dovish Israel lobby. Suddenly, he wants to influence the character of a Jewish state about which he loudly cares nothing. Once again, he bears no responsibility. Perhaps his sense of his own purity also underwrites his heartlessness in business. As a big currency player in the world markets, Soros was at least partially responsible for the decline in the British pound.

Forget my differences with Soros's Jewishness. Call it shul politics. But the characterization of the United States under Bush as Nazi is much bigger, and more grave, than shul politics. It casts a shadow over U.S. politics. In the same conversation at Davos, Soros announced that he is supporting Senator Barack Obama, though he would also support Senator Hillary Clinton. So my question to both of those progressives is this: How, without any explanation or apology from him, will you take this man's money? ■

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Bush and Cheney's not-so-well-oiled machine.

Crude Joke

BY JOHN B. JUDIS

IF THERE WAS one thing George W. Bush and his clique were supposed to know, it was oil. That, at least, was the widespread consensus back in 2000, when Bush first sought the White House, and it was easy to understand why. Bush's grandfather was an oilman. His father was an oilman. He himself had worked in oil. His vice presidential nominee, Dick Cheney, was the former CEO of energy giant Halliburton. His campaign's chairman, Donald Evans, was CEO of the oil company Tom Brown. And his top foreign policy adviser, Condoleezza Rice, had served on the board of Chevron—which named an oil tanker after her.

Oil executives were practically salivating at the prospect of a Bush presidency. As one told Fox News in October 2000, the way to fix our energy policy was to turn to "people that know something about the business, and, of course, that's George W. and Dick Cheney." Liberals, by contrast, were alarmed. "This is the first time in history Big Oil has had two men at the top of the ticket," warned Al Gore's deputy campaign manager. But, whether you viewed the Republican candidate's ties to the energy industry as a blessing or a curse, one thing seemed beyond dispute: that, when it came to oil, President Bush would know what he was doing, for better or for worse.

If only that had proved true. Six years later, no one—not even oil executives—could plausibly claim to be impressed with Bush's handling of energy issues. The administration has presided over a threefold increase in oil prices, the growing power of foreign oil and gas producers at the expense of American ones, and a rise in oil nationalism that threatens to freeze U.S. companies out of foreign oil fields. Bush has also contributed to political turbulence in energy-producing countries and inflamed a growing oil rivalry with China and Russia that seems to be turning nastier by the day. "Some of us thought that, after the Clinton years, we had an administration with the Cheneys and Bushes and Evans coming in that understood the energy sector better," former Chevron executive Edward Chow told me. "We thought there would be a more thoughtful, nuanced policy, and that it would open more windows of opportunity in Mexico or even Iran, and a more productive relationship with Russia that would lead to real investments and real benefits economically. Whether it was 9/11 or something else, it certainly didn't work out."

To their credit, Bush officials have belatedly come to understand that they have a problem on their hands—a big one. Hence Bush's complaint in his 2006 State of the Union address that America is "addicted to oil" and his call in this year's speech for the country to "increase the supply of alternative fuels." And hence Rice's admission last April to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "nothing has really taken me aback more as secretary of state than the way that the politics of energy is—I will use the word 'warping'—diplomacy around the world."

But it's one thing to recognize the problem and quite another to do something about it. To dig himself out of the hole he has created, Bush is now pursuing risky strategies on energy policy in both Central Asia and the Middle East. And, far from compensating for the failures of the last six years, these gambits may only be making things worse.

IT SEEMS LIKE a distant memory now, but perhaps the biggest story in Washington during Bush's first eight months in office was energy—specifically the energy task force led by Dick Cheney. The Cheney group's controversial report appeared in May 2001 and was primarily devoted to parroting the domestic agenda of oil companies, which wanted, as always, less government regulation. Only a single chapter—the last—delved into international energy policy. Its focus was on "diversification"—that is, reducing U.S. reliance on Middle Eastern oil.

Presidents have been trying to "diversify" America's oil supply since the Arab boycott of 1973. Bush's initial strategy for diversification emphasized—incredibly, in retrospect—Russia and Venezuela. Cheney's report touted "bilateral working groups" and "private investment opportunities" with the Russians and "incentives for increased investment" with the Venezuelans.

And, initially, that strategy seemed to work. During Bush's first 18 months in office, he and the Russians got along swimmingly. Moscow even declared its commitment—sought by the Bush administration—to undercutting OPEC's oil pricing. But, since then, relations between the two countries have become increasingly fractious, as Russia has turned toward nationalization and away from foreign investment. Moscow has thrown roadblocks in the way of investments by ExxonMobil and Royal Dutch Shell in the Sakhalin natural gas fields in the western Pacific, while rejecting offers by Chevron and ConocoPhillips to invest in the Shtokman field in the Barents Sea. The Kremlin has also blocked a U.S. plan to build an undersea pipeline across the Caspian Sea that would carry natural gas from Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan and across Turkey to Europe—bypassing Russia entirely. Explains Martha Olcott, a Central Asia expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Any company that moved gas undersea would be closed out of Russia."

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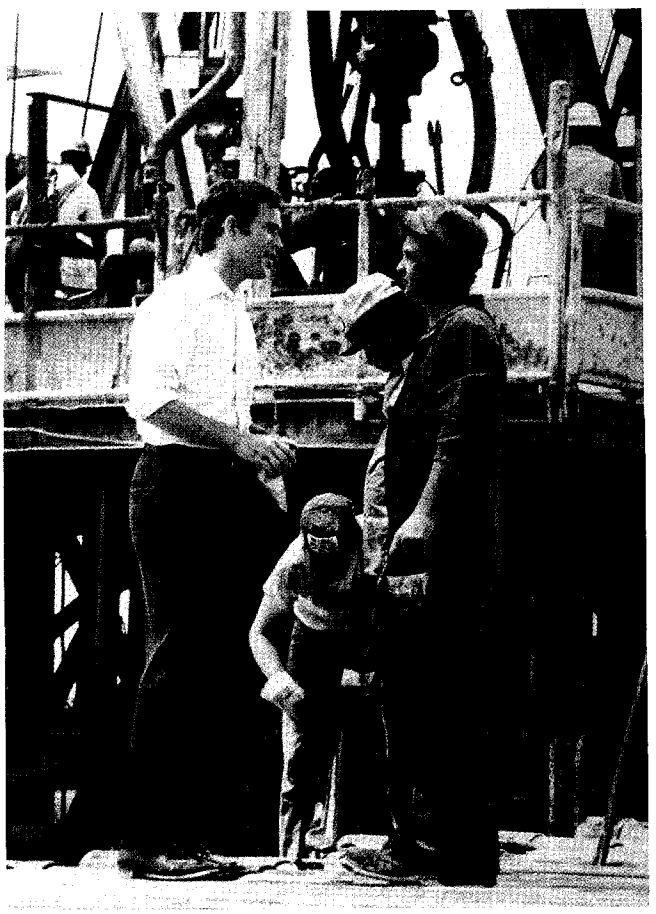
Some of Russia's moves were in response to high oil and gas prices caused by growing international demand. And Vladimir Putin clearly saw his country's newfound oil and gas wealth as the means to reviving Russia's great-power status. But part of the fault for this situation also lies with Bush. While Putin initially sought a good relationship with the United States, Bush kept testing the limits of his goodwill. The administration championed NATO's expansion up to Russia's borders; abrogated the anti-missile treaty; backed anti-Russian governments in the Ukraine and Georgia; invaded and occupied Iraq, Russia's longtime ally; and threatened to cancel Russian oil contracts with Iraq. And, to top things off, there were the U.S.-backed efforts to build pipelines bypassing Russia. In response, says Flynt Leverett, a former member of the Bush National Security Council, Russia decided to "push back."

During its first year, the Bush administration also enjoyed relatively amicable relations with Venezuela. At an October 2001 event in Washington, Department of Energy official Vicki Bailey lauded America's "strengthened partnership" with the Venezuelans. The country, Bailey noted, had been one of the first oil producers to express its condolences and to promise increased output to prevent a spike in oil prices after September 11. And the Venezuelan energy ministry had begun working with the Bush administration and with U.S. companies on expanding production of natural gas. But it wasn't long before the partnership disintegrated, with Venezuela, like Russia, turning toward oil nationalism and becoming hostile to U.S. investment. Even though the Venezuelan oil industry has always been focused on exporting to the United States, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez struck deals with the Chinese that could eventually divert crude oil from the United States to China. He also raised taxes on, and demanded renegotiated contracts from, foreign producers. Recently, he threatened to nationalize four oil ventures in the Faja region that are funded by Chevron, ConocoPhillips, and ExxonMobil. Meanwhile, Chávez has used his country's oil wealth as leverage to organize international alliances against the United States—and with some success in Latin America, where Bolivia and other countries now generally follow Venezuela's geopolitical lead.

Here again, Bush must shoulder a portion of the blame. Chávez was never a fan of the United States—during the Clinton administration, he broke off cooperation on joint narcotics operations—but, in his first years in office, he at least cooperated with U.S. oil companies. That ended in April 2002, when the Bush administration called the abortive coup against him a "victory for democracy" (despite the fact that his would-be successor seemed inclined toward authoritarianism). Bush then proceeded to create sympathy throughout Latin America for Chávez's anti-American stance. In February 2003, American officials tried to strong-arm U.N. Security Council members Chile and Mexico into backing the unpopular U.S. invasion of Iraq. When the presidency of the Organization of American States opened up in 2005, the administration conducted what *The Washington Post* called "heavy lobbying" for Francisco Flores, the former president of El Salvador, whose principal distinction was that he had backed the Iraq war. Latin American countries, offended by U.S. pressure, chose Chávez's pick, Chilean Jose Miguel Insulza, instead. Davidson College political scientist Russell Crandall, a Latin America expert who served on the National Security Council in 2004 and 2005, says the United States "played into Chávez's hands." "It's just a cold war administration," he explains. "After they took office, it was all about getting Castro, and Chávez was, by extension, Castro, and they didn't understand that the region had evolved." According to Crandall, when the White House wasn't decrying the Venezuelan leader's influence, it was simply ignoring Latin America. "When I was there, you couldn't get anyone to focus on the region until there was a crisis. It was another consequence of the Iraq war."

Other administration efforts to diversify America's oil supply fared almost as badly. In Central Asia, the United States increasingly ran into hostility from former Soviet states and competition from China. According to Olcott, the only country in the region where U.S. influence has increased is Tajikistan, which produces a miniscule amount of natural gas. In West Africa, the Chinese are using development aid and indifference to human rights to cut into American standing. "We are going to see U.S. firms evicted out of West Africa, because they are not offering what the



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Chinese or Indians are offering," predicts Paul Michael Wihbey, president of GWEST, a Washington, D.C., energy consulting firm and a past adviser to the Bush administration. With the chill that set in after September 11 and the invasion of Iraq, the administration wasn't even able to convince President Vicente Fox to allow U.S. investment in Mexico's oil industry.

It's true that U.S. oil companies have enjoyed large profits during the Bush years. But oil executives realize that their long-term prospects depend on investment in countries with plentiful oil and gas reserves. And, in that respect, the Bush era has been an unmitigated disaster.

OF COURSE, THE United States isn't just responsible for filling the coffers of U.S. oil companies. Since the end of World War II, the United States has also assumed primary responsibility for the smooth working of the international economy, which depends very much on stable oil supplies. By that measure, too, the Bush years have been an abysmal failure. Nowhere is that more evident than in the Middle East.

Many antiwar activists have insisted that the United States invaded Iraq to seize its oil. The facts, however, don't support this explanation. By most accounts, the decision to depose Saddam Hussein, made sometime in early 2002, was precipitated directly by September 11 and was aimed, as much as anything, at making the Middle East inhospitable to movements like Al Qaeda.

But, while it would be wrong to call oil the primary impetus behind the Iraq war, it would be equally wrong to pretend that it was not a consideration. Bush, like his father and Bill Clinton, wanted to prevent a hostile power from acquiring hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East, and he feared that Saddam, armed eventually with nuclear weapons, would pose a threat to the region's other oil-producing states. As one State Department official told me on the eve of the invasion, "If the Gulf produced kumquats, would we be doing this? I have my doubts."

And so, as the plans for war solidified, administration officials began to think about what could be done with Iraqi oil. Paul Wolfowitz and other Pentagon officials argued that profits from Iraq's oil industry could finance the country's reconstruction after the invasion. That was the reason U.S. troops expended so much initial effort securing Iraqi oil fields from sabotage and protecting the oil ministry from looters. Administration officials also imagined that, once the Iraqi oil industry was revived by foreign investment, it could flood the market, undermining OPEC efforts to maintain high prices. Such dreams were dashed by the rise of the insurgency and, eventually, the onset of civil war.

To be sure, administration officials still hope to get U.S. companies into Iraq. The country's new oil law—written with help from BearingPoint, a McLean, Virginia–based consulting firm—will facilitate private investment. Iraqi officials are still wrangling over the details of how revenue will be distributed, but it has been widely reported that the law will contain a generous profit-sharing arrangement to lure foreign investors. And Chevron and ExxonMobil are already negotiating with the Iraqi government to build a $3 billion petrochemical plant.

But the administration's energy strategy in the Middle East no longer revolves around hopes of undermining OPEC. Instead, it centers on a new challenge: the prospect that a hostile Iranian regime, strengthened by America's misadventure in Iraq, could eventually dominate the region, threaten the House of Saud, and disrupt the stability of the international oil market.

SOMETIME AFTER THE 2004 election, perhaps sensing it had made a mess of things, the White House began to revise its international energy strategy. The most important factors were the administration's failures in Russia, Venezuela, and Iraq. But Bush officials also had been caught unawares by the rise in oil demand from China and India, which helped push up prices. Oil experts now foresaw a coming supply-demand crunch that could precipitate a steep rise in prices and perhaps an international recession. Worries about global oil supply "peaking" sometime in the coming decades also began to surface within the administration. In February 2005, the Department of Energy warned that "at peaking, unless adequate substitute fuels and transportation-efficiency policies have been implemented well in advance, the price of oil will increase dramatically with severe adverse national and international economic consequences."

Bush was also provoked by growing concern among policy and business elites, some of whom were close to the White House. These included former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger; Robert Gates, who would later become secretary of defense; and FedEx founder and CEO Frederick Smith, a key Bush fund-raiser. Kissinger warned, in June 2005, that the clash over access to oil and gas was leading to a revival of the "great game"—the nineteenth-century contest among imperial powers for control over Central Asia. Gates joined a group of former high-ranking officials to simulate how the government might respond to an oil supply crisis. Their report, presented in January 2006 at the Davos World Economic Forum, warned that "political unrest ... in key oil producing countries may pose a greater threat to the long-term stability of the world oil market than terrorism." For his part, Smith co-chaired a policy group, the Energy Security Leadership Council, which, in December 2006, called for an "aggressive campaign to reduce our dependence on oil and increase domestic and global energy security."

The administration has not responded to these concerns with a single comprehensive strategy but with what Wihbey calls a "hodgepodge," proceeding haphazardly on three different fronts. First, it has proposed reducing domestic oil consumption by raising fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks and by encouraging alternative fuels like ethanol. Second, it has taken an aggressive stance against

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Russia and China. (It still hasn't figured out what to do about Venezuela.) And, third, it has adopted a Saudi-instigated strategy for dealing with the threat of Iranian hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East. The first of these strategies is uncontroversial, except perhaps among the Big Three automakers, but the second and third represent high-risk ventures that could put America's—and the world's—energy supply at even greater peril.

To warn Russia and China against monopolizing oil sources in the developing world, Bush has opted for a confrontational approach. Cheney fired the opening salvo when he attacked Russia's human rights record and its use of oil and gas as "tools of intimidation and blackmail" in a speech in Vilnius, Lithuania, last May. The next day, he traveled to Kazakhstan, where he expressed "admiration" for its authoritarian government and where Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher, who was traveling with Cheney, urged Kazakhstan to ship more of its natural gas to Europe through a pipeline that bypasses Russia.

The administration has taken a similarly heavy-handed approach to Chinese investments in Central Asia, West Africa, and Latin America. To be sure, Bush officials are not of one mind on China. Some, like Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke—who recently traveled to Beijing to begin a "strategic economic dialogue" that would include energy—clearly want to work with China. Others, however, do not. In its revised National Security Strategy, released last March, the White House suggested war might break out if China's leaders diverge from a "peaceful path" by "acting as if they can somehow 'lock up' energy supplies around the world" and by "supporting resource-rich countries without regard to the misrule at home or misbehavior abroad of those regimes."

Predictably, the administration's approach seems to be backfiring. Washington's hostility toward the Russians and Chinese has united the two countries—longtime rivals—against the United States, particularly in Central Asia. In 2005, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—a group consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—called on the United States to withdraw its troops from Central Asia. This year, the countries plan to conduct joint military exercises with members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, an alliance consisting of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. As Joshua Kurlantzick argued in these pages last year ("Crude Awakening," October 2, 2006), these strengthened ties signal the emergence of a new alliance—consisting of energy-producing states, plus China—that may seek to limit Western access to Central Asian oil and gas. Here again, the Bush administration's energy strategies appear to be coming up empty.

In the Middle East, the United States has abandoned its attempt to democratize the region, including the Saudi monarchy, and is now focused on preventing Iranian hegemony. According to two oil experts who have excellent sources within the administration—Wihbey and Ariel Cohen of the Heritage Foundation—Bush has taken his cue from the Saudis. Cheney met with Saudi officials, including King Abdullah, in November in Riyadh; and, sometime in December, according to these sources, White House officials met Prince Bandar, the Saudi national security adviser and former ambassador to the United States, when he made one of his unannounced visits to Washington. That month, Bandar won a power struggle when Prince Turki, his successor as ambassador to the United States, resigned. While Turki backed the position of the Baker-Hamilton Commission that the United States should negotiate with Iran, Bandar favored an attempt to isolate Saudi Arabia's rival to the east.

And, apparently, that was exactly what he persuaded Bush to do. The Saudi strategy consists of getting the United States to join a coalition with two other Sunni-dominated states, Egypt and Jordan, against Iranian influence in the region. "The Saudis are putting a lot of pressure to crack down on Iranians," says Gal Luft, executive director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, an influential energy think tank. "What worries them is that a conflict in the Persian Gulf will awaken the Shiite community, which sits atop of oil in Saudi Arabia as well as Iraq. We don't want that to happen as well." The Saudis propose using their excess capacity to bring down oil prices to the detriment of the Iranian economy. The United States, for its part, would undertake an offensive in Iraq that would send a message to the Iranians not to interfere in that country's politics. According to Wihbey and Cohen, both of whom have advised the Bush administration on energy, Bandar was the driving force behind Bush's acceptance of the surge strategy in Iraq. Wihbey says the surge was "heavily driven by Saudis trying to undermine Iranians any way they can. When Bandar was here, the message he gave was, 'If you Americans pull out, we—the Saudis, Egypt, and Jordan—are going to send money to Sunnis, and there is going to be a Sunni-Shiite conflict in that area that is going to spill over into the Persian Gulf. You'll end with a recession.' That is really what Bush was listening to when he thought of the surge. Bandar is one of the few people who can talk to Bush and tell him he is wrong."

If these reports are accurate—and the recent downward movement of oil prices suggests they are—then Bush has undertaken a dangerous tack in the Persian Gulf. Instead of attempting to bring Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria, into a settlement, he is allying the United States with the Sunni side in a regional conflict—while continuing to work with some pro-Iranian Shia in Iraq. If this strategy works, it could restore Saudi and U.S. hegemony in the Persian Gulf. If it fails—if the United States is forced to withdraw from Iraq and if the insurgency spreads outward—then we will have lost ground in a region that contains two-thirds of the world's proven reserves. It would be the worst failure yet in a six-year span that has seen the United States commit some mind-boggling blunders on energy policy. Maybe the Bush people didn't know as much about oil as everyone thought. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Commitments

A FEW MONTHS AGO, THE American documentarian James Longley gave us *Iraq in Fragments*, which looked under the big news stories to some strands of Iraqi life, less about the war than about living. Now Philip Haas, the American director of such intelligent fiction films as *The Music of Chance* and *Angels and Insects*, has made a sort of companion piece to Longley's film, called **THE SITUATION**. This is the first picture that, fictional though it is, tries to deal with some realities of the Iraq war itself. Familiarly, the first casualty of war is truth: Haas tries to cut through the public presentation of the war to some of the actualities.

THE SITUATION
(Shadow)

MAFIOSO
(Rialto)

He is not concerned with responsibility for the war but with what is going on among people, American and Iraqi. Of course the best war correspondents—and there certainly are some good ones—are not fakers; but they have neither the space nor the mission to plumb character. *The Situation* wants to provide some insight into the people who are in motion behind the data.

The key person in this project was obviously the screenwriter. She is a journalist named Wendell Steavenson who spent a year in Iraq and whose writings attracted Haas. She would surely be the last to claim that she has rendered the whole of the situation, but there seems no reason to doubt the verity of what she does tell us—stories of Iraqi corruption, ambition, sectarian commitments, family devotion; stories of American military and political intent being ground into accommodating shape by daily wear and tear. Very little of the screenplay is surprising, yet it continually jogs us because of its immediacy and because it is so different from what we are fed every day from Washington. For instance, no one in this film, Americans especially, ever uses terms like "victory" or "stay the course." And the Iraqi talk about Americans is often full of dislike and contempt and plans to exploit.

The screenplay has a basic fault. It is not much more than a fictional armature for the display of political opinions and actions—and crimes, both Iraqi and American. (The picture begins with U.S. soldiers throwing an Iraqi youth off a bridge to his death, an incident that Steavenson had in fact reported.) One central figure is an American journalist, played by the Danish actress Connie Nielsen, who is in the role apparently because producers once again insisted on having an attractive woman on hand. This journalist has two boyfriends, an American intelligence officer (Damian Lewis) and a Christian Arab photographer (Mido Hamada). The personal scenes among these three are like the recitative sections in nineteenth-century Italian opera: transitions to the arias, which here are the plotting and action scenes.

Haas made the film in Morocco, with Rabat standing in for Baghdad. Aided by his editor, Curtiss Clayton, he has kept the complications clear and the action vivid. Haas's sympathies seem to be with everyone in the picture (murderers excepted); he comprehends the pressures on each of them. So, if at last *The Situation* doesn't clarify problems or inspire hope about Iraq, it decently confirms the viewer's misery.

If the name of the Italian director Alberto Lattuada registers with film enthusiasts today, it is probably because in 1950 he allowed one of his screenwriters—a man named Federico Fellini—to co-direct a film with him. It was the start of Fellini's directing career, which soon eclipsed Lattuada's. This is hardly unjust. Lattuada's work is not near Fellini's, but some of it is well worth remembering.

Now we have a chance to remember it, with one of Lattuada's best, **MAFIOSO**, made in 1962 with Alberto Sordi. Rialto Pictures has re-issued the film as part of its program to bring back valuable foreign pictures with freshened subtitles. The screenplay of *Mafioso* rests on a theme that was important in postwar Italian film—the contrast between northern and southern Italy (Olmi's *The Fiancés*, Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*). Apparently the end of the war made even clearer the contrast between the industrialized north and those parts of the south—Sicily, for chief instance—that were still in a previous century. (In Olmi's film, workers in a new Sicilian factory, all of whom had been farmers, do not come to work on a rainy day.)

Sordi plays a Sicilian who, white-coated and efficient, is now a technician at a Fiat plant in Milan. On his vacation he takes his blonde northern wife and their two blonde little girls back to his hometown in Sicily, which these northerners have never seen. The reunion in Sicily is full of kisses, mostly between Sordi and his relatives and friends: his wife is considerably more formal—initially, at least.

The Mafia is still what it always was in this town—supreme—and the local don is glad to see Sordi again because this up-to-date technician was once an apprentice (so to speak) in the Mafia. The don has a job for him, one that needs a new face. Sordi is torn about doing the job, torn between his past and his present, but he finally accepts because of the "concern" shown by the don and his henchmen about Sordi's family. (How solicitous and affectionate they are. How clear the threat is.) Sordi does the job, which involves a quick round trip to New York. His wife thinks he has been off on a hunting trip with old friends.

The contrast between his Milanese self and his Sicilian self is sharp enough and comic, for a time. The comedy then slips into bitter satire—about concepts of honor and the enforcements of same. The triumph of the film, its most subtle

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and disturbing touch, is the very last shot, back in the Fiat plant. Sordi, bound by past obligations and what they entail, has committed a crime; so, conditioned as we are by our own conventions, we expect to see the effect of the crime on him. But in the last shot he is exactly as he was in the opening—brisk, technological. He has left the crime behind him with his Sicilian self. Simply by paying no attention to the contrast, Lattuada is telling us that these cultural counterpoints will continue in Italy—even though this Fiat plant is as modern as Sicily is not.

Sordi was one of three Italian leading men in postwar Italian film—the others were Ugo Tognazzi and Nino Manfredi—who usually played the Average Man. Perhaps it was a reaction to the operatics and strutting of the fascist era, but postwar Italy had a fondness for the guy next door. Sordi always makes me wish he lived next door to me. ■

James Wolcott

Smugged by Reality

THROUGH THE CHILDREN'S GATE: A HOME IN NEW YORK
By Adam Gopnik
(Alfred A. Knopf, 336 pp., $25)

I SOMETIMES WONDER IF ADAM Gopnik was put on this earth to annoy. If so, mission accomplished. Mind you, he finds himself in fine company in my illustrious literary perp walk. Francine Prose, with her pinched perceptions and humorless hauteur—every time she brings out a new book (she is depressingly diligent), I find myself grumbling, "*Her* again?" I've never gotten the point of Paul Auster and his swami mystique and probably never shall, unless I move to Brooklyn and achieve phosphorescence. Walter Kirn, what a hustler. But no tactician of letters has shown a greater knack for worming his way into our hearts whether we want him there or not than Adam Gopnik, the art-world observer, former Paris correspondent for *The New Yorker* (out of whose dispatches was spun the best-selling *Paris to the Moon*), and the magazine's resident tone-poet of post–9/11 Manhattan, drizzling pixie dust across a cityscape that no longer bears the hearty flavor of "smoked mozzarella," as he notoriously described the downtown death smell. It isn't that Gopnik is ungifted or imperceptive, or a slickster trickster like his colleague Malcolm Gladwell, who markets marketing. He is avidly talented and spongily absorbent, an earnest little eager beaver whose twitchy aura of neediness makes him hard to dislike until the preciosity simply becomes too much.

A careerist with delicate antennae, he wants to be encouraged, petted, praised, promoted, and congratulated. (In *Gone: The Last Days of The New Yorker*, Renata Adler memorably encapsulated his modus operandi: "I had learned over the course of conversations with Mr. Gopnik that his questions were not questions, or even quite soundings. Their purpose was to maneuver you into advising him to do what he would, in any case, walk over corpses to do.") He is forever soliciting the reader's approval with an array of cloying ploys that become gimmicky and self-conscious. If he can be considered guilty of "meaching" (Adler's picturesque word), it must be conceded that he has meached his way to the journalistic top, and an air of attainment cups his latest themed collection, *Through the Children's Gate*. Gopnik's Manhattan in these pages recalls Woody Allen's playground circa 1986 (the year of *Hannah and Her Sisters*, the year Gopnik began writing for *The New Yorker*), an Upper East Side version of pastoral set to the cabaret tinkle of a piano playing in the next room and the cricket chirps of names and cultural signifiers being dropped. But where there were few children noisily underfoot in Woody Allen's cinematic parlor, entering *Through the Children's Gate* is like visiting Munchkin Land, with Gopnik as Munchkin mayor.

After extracting as much good copy as contemporary Paris had to offer, Gopnik and family—wife Martha, son Luke, and

James Wolcott is a contributing writer to VANITY FAIR.

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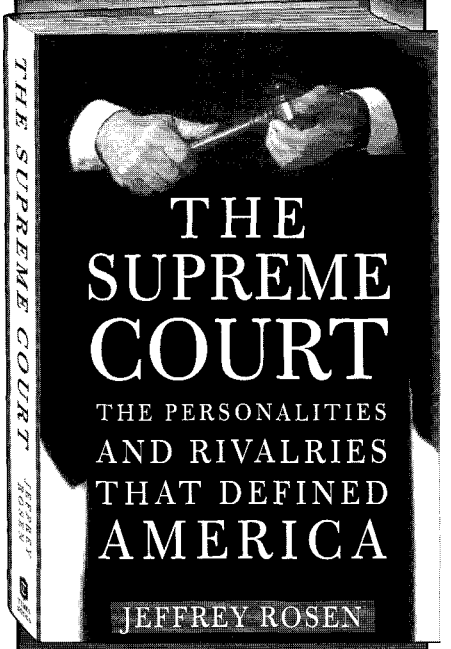
—LAURENCE TRIBE



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daughter Olivia—returned to New York in 2000 to "make a home here for good," free of French exactitude. The Children's Gate was their port of entry. "The Children's Gate exists, and you really can go through it. It's the name for the entrance to Central Park at Seventy-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue.... Now my family had, in a way, decided to pass through as children, too." In the family unit's absence from New York, the patter of little feet had become thundering hooves. "[By] the time we came home, the city had been repopulated—some would say overrun—with children. It was now the drug addicts and transvestites and artists who were left muttering about the undesirable, short element taking over the neighborhood. New York had become, almost comically, a children's city again, with kiddie-coiffure joints where sex shops had once stood and bare, ruined singles bars turned into play-and-party centers." Convoys of baby strollers cruised sidewalks once crunchy with crack vials, and the Times Square where Travis Bickle hunched his shoulders in the steam-risen satanic night was now a diorama of Disney favorites.

There are those who will decry the loss of that old bedlam spirit, as low-rent creative funk is flushed out by high-priced emporia and homogenized chain stores (goodbye CBGB, hello Duane Reade), but there is no disputing that Manhattan is a safer, cleaner, nicer, more hospitable city than the hellhole of shock-horror *New York Post* headlines of yore (such as the immortal "Headless Body in Topless Bar"). As Gopnik puts it, "it is hard to compare the *Mad Max* blackout of '77 with the *Romper Room* blackout of '03 and insist that something has gone so terribly wrong with the city." Certainly it's preferable to raise children in a city where stray whizzing bullets are at a minimum and the dead don't rise after dusk. Is it needless to add, though, that the urban arcadia in which Gopnik exults is almost exclusively the preserve of an affluent, mostly white cultural elite able to afford private-school tuitions and trips abroad? I don't mean to get political or anything, but I don't see the Hispanic and black parents in my neighborhood shuttling their kids to "kiddie-coiffure joints." Gopnik tends to universalize his impressions, to generalize from his insulation.

"There's no bad place to watch children grow [Beirut, Rwanda, Baghdad?], but Manhattan is a good one," he writes. Good? Why, it's the best! "Ah, the children, the children!" he exclaims. "Has any place ever been better contoured to them than Manhattan is now? We take them out on fall Saturday mornings—Paul Desmond saxophone mornings, as I think of them, lilting jazz sounds almost audible in the avenues—to go to the Whitney or the park to look dutifully at what remains of the avant-garde in Chelsea, or to shop at Fairway, a perfect place, more moving than any Parisian market in its openness, its joy, a place where they have cheap soap lets you taste of six different olive oils [*sic*]." This bountiful note of yuppie triumphalism warbles through the book—of the label "yuppie" itself, Gopnik gloats, "We were called that, derisively, before the world was ours"—as the pride and pleasure that he and his co-evals take in their exalted taste buds and their little geniuses reflect flatteringly on their own achievements, material sense of well-being, and immersion in the vital, fizzing stream of urban resplendence.

AND YUPPIE TRIUMPHALISM entwines with New York chauvinism, as civic pride fluffs its chest feathers and proclaims bragging rights. It is tiresome and a little puzzling how New Yorkers feel the need to keep asserting that "We're Number One." London is a world-class capital with an all-star historical cast, but you don't hear London authors crooning and crowing about their city's brio, flair, resilience, and iconic status at regular intervals. London's greatness is taken more in stride by the locals. But here it's as if the influx of wealth that has spiked real estate values since the 9/11 bounceback has endowed the city with some of the smug exclusivity of a gated community. In a "Talk of the Town" piece in 2005, Gopnik lamented the new street signs that were being bolted into place at Manhattan's daunting intersections. The new signs were aesthetically displeasing, he argued, and, worse, they catered to the alien and the uninitiated. "New York is not a hard place to get around in. If you don't know where you are, you don't deserve to be here." There speaks the Manhattan provincial. We've come a long way, obviously, from "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere," as Frank Sinatra and Liza Minnelli used to instruct in that fight anthem "New York, New York." It used to be that earning the battle stripes of a true New Yorker was a challenge to be met. Now it's a privilege that derives from the steep admission price.

In with the in-crowd, Gopnik isn't content with his contentment—he feels compelled to deliver a sales pitch, a pushy ode to innocence and New York's days of heaven. "*But why such a fuss about children in New York, or anywhere*? I hear some level head (not you, reader) sigh. *Can't we simply accept childhood, really, as children do, as just a preface to personhood?*" No, we—he—cannot. For childhood is the lost paradise from which most adults have been exiled. "Children reconnect us to romance," he writes. For them, "every morning is the first morning in Paris, every day is the first day of love," and through their translucent eyes ours are given a fresh polish: "They compel us to see the world as an unusual place again. Sharing a life with them is sharing a life with lovers, explorers, scientists, pirates, poets. It makes for interesting mornings." Until the first major growth spurt turns them into aliens with iPod ear buds attached, children rejoice in the sunbeam spotlight of pure exuberance. "And then they are not here to do better, or to be smarter, or to get ready: They are here to *be*, and they know it. We delight in children because they keep the seven notes of enlightenment, as the Buddha noted them. Keep them? They sing them, they *are* them: energy, joy, concentration, attentiveness, mindfulness, curiosity, equanimity."

That's not how I recall my childhood, I seem to remember a lot of lulls and cloudy intervals, but who can blame Gopnik for wanting to play dress-up himself and enjoy that extra-special morning playtime joy? As when, in one of the book's more wince-inducing sections, he gets kitted out with a walkie-talkie and an orange vest to do his tour of duty as a school safety patrol and, securing the streets, finds his true Barney Fife part in life. "It was the first *purely* happy time I'd known in years. Round and round the blocks, seeing the kids going home, saying with truly obnoxious officiousness (and to Luke's extreme embarrassment, when he saw me), 'Okay, kids—let's move on! Okay, kids—let's get home. Everybody home now.'" He works up quite an appetite ordering those snots about, and, like many a patrolman, feels the need for doughnut nourishment. "After a solid, virtuous hour of safety patrol, I decided to stop for a quick, excusable, union-sanctioned break. (The union would have blessed it had they known

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about it, and had I belonged to one.) I ducked into the Starbucks—leaving my poor private school charges, I suppose, for a moment completely naked to the Hobbesian elements—and got in line." An incident occurs in line that allows Gopnik to flex his junior G-man authority and regale his family later with his heroics, only to have Martha pinprick his pride in her recurring role as ego-deflator: " 'The really sad thing, children,' said my wife, 'is that he means it ... your father would like to be some kind of cappuccino commando, making sure that milk steamers don't get used nefariously." It's a bit too formulaic and pat: *Life With Father* pre-shrunk for a less patriarchal, more self-deprecating age; and the arch dialogue doesn't ring true. That "nefariously" dangles.

It can't be easy living with a husband given to regular swoons of enchantment, and one sympathizes with Martha when she lodges a concern that the Purim talk—his "Purimspiel," which anyway means "Purim play"—that Gopnik is preparing to give at a black-tie dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria might produce a classic Jewish midlife sentimental jag. "Is this going to be one of those things where you end up still skeptical but strangely exhilarated by the faith of your fathers? ... Because if it is, I don't want you to do it. It's hard enough having you around morose all the time. It would be even worse if you were strangely exhilarated." But it will take more than a caution flag to subdue the Gopper and trim his gossamer wings.

STRANGE EXHILARATION WHEEZES throughout *Through the Children's Gate* (tempered with the doubts and frets that fleck across every parent's internal monitor), never more so than in the chapter on the kindergarten production of *Peter Pan* at Luke's school ("the full musical, complete with the wonderful Moose Charlap music"), where the technical challenge of making the children fly becomes a governing metaphor for the "general buoyancy of the age—everything else is flying, stocks, real estate prices, why not the children?" Why not, indeed? Not that he advocates launching the buggers into orbit. "We want our children to fly, and we want them to be tethered. We believe in freedom for them, but freedom within narrow channels of liberty, parent-tested and precut. We want them to fly, but we want them to fly as kites do, as Macy's balloons do, safely on the ends of strings, not freely, as birds do, Mother [an allusion to a line in *Macbeth*]." But even a restricted flight-pattern doesn't dampen Gopnik's enthusiasm once the mechanics have been ironed out and everyone's qualms are addressed—one scheme, involving the parents dressing in ninja black and holding the cast members aloft, is vetoed when a voice of sanity points out that having adults bursting from the wings and grabbing children "would cause panic and fear"—because the hours of thought and effort invested by the ad hoc aviation-school kindergarten committee testifies that American parents, unlike their pissy French counterparts, "*will do anything to make their children fly*." Italics give way to exclamations as Gopnik recaps opening night and submits a rave review. "*Peter Pan* opened at last [as if it had been in pre-production for years]. It was wonderful! The force of the story, the children longing to be free, the songs, the sword fights ... a great show! Everyone was delighted. And the children flew! *How* they flew!"

It's a wonder Gopnik himself wasn't on stage skimming above the London chimneys, such is his empathetic glomming-on. If it's trying for the wife to have Gopnik leaving a vapor trail around the house when strange exhilaration hits, it can't be easy for the kids having their father always hovering around for material, taking down their latest witticism at the dinner table to work into a future piece, documenting every rite of passage in Rea Irvin typeface. There are times when Gopnik's children seem to be trying to humor him, obliging dad with enough whimsical interludes and reusable anecdotes to get through the winter.

Some of their dividends pay off. Perhaps the best-known piece in the book is "Bumping into Mr. Ravioli," an account of daughter Olivia's vexing relationship with Charlie Ravioli, an imaginary sidekick who is seldom at her side. For most children, an imaginary friend is a constant companion, a secret sharer, but Mr. Ravioli is a phantom always on the go, hard to book for a long chat: "She sighs sometimes at her inability to make their schedules mesh." Concerned that Mr. Ravioli might be a figment of buried trauma (shades of Val Lewton's *The Curse of the*

TEST

Subject: the First Amendment

INSTRUCTIONS: The following question has only one answer. Take as much time as you need:

(1) As conceived and ratified by the Founding Fathers, the free speech provision of the First Amendment guarantees Congress shall make no law abridging:

(a) the freedom, through the use of words, to advance political and social ideas in order to prevent governmental tyranny.

(b) the freedom to distribute photographic images of women and men engaged in various acts of prostitution.

Although the members of the United States Supreme Court have been tested, and repeatedly re-tested, on this issue over the course of five decades, they have never answered the question correctly. In fact, they have never even come close.

UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Fifty Years Since Roth v. United States

The National Tragedy of the Supreme Court's Misjudgment on Obscenity

by Daniel Mark Cohen

at on-line bookstores

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Cat People), Gopnik phones his sister Alison, a developmental psychologist who has just finished a review of Marjorie Taylor's study *Imaginary Companions and the Children Who Create Them*. Alison assures him that Olivia's fictional offshoot is a healthy by-product of developing consciousness—the conversion of impressions and experience into creative narrative. "I grasp that it's normal for her to have an imaginary friend," Gopnik says, "but have you ever heard of an imaginary friend who's too busy to play with you?" Pause. "She thought about it. 'No,' she said. 'I'm sure that doesn't occur anywhere in the research literature. That sounds *completely* New York.' "

So it is, the urban condition in a convenient can, as Gopnik diagnoses Ravioli's bump-and-run tactics as symptomatic of the postmodern syndrome that has made Manhattanites the masters of avoidance maneuvers, a race of artful dodgers. "Like Charlie Ravioli, we hop into taxis and leave messages on answering machines to avoid our acquaintances, and find that we keep missing our friends. I have one intimate who lives just across the park from me, whom I e-mail often, and whom I am fortunate to see two or three times a year. We are always . . . busy. He has become my Charlie Ravioli, my invisible friend." I think of this as the "This Week's Not Looking Good for Me" syndrome. Try setting anything up in New York and nailing down a specific date, and one party or the other will inevitably weasel, "This week isn't looking good for me, but next week looks good." Then next week arrives and it doesn't look good either, having mysteriously worsened over the weekend. Rinse, lather, and repeat, each postponement followed by another postponement, each punt followed by another punt downfield, the disjointed tango of phone tag and excuse-making prolonged until the two parties forget the original reason they intended to meet and become vaguely irritated with each other. Gopnik: "The crowding of our space has been reinforced by a crowding of our time, and the only way to protect ourselves is to build structures of perpetual deferral: I'll see you next week, let's talk soon."

With Charlie Ravioli, Gopnik cleverly wired a Walter Mitty–ish fantasy figure into the jump-cut discontinuities that we take for granted as the frictional tax of being entwined in a neural network of e-mail, instant messages, customized ring tones, and "Lt. Uhura" Bluetooth devices—millions of individuals bubble-wrapped in our own talky cartoon balloons. Olivia deserves a cut of the royalties for giving her father such a valuable donnée, as Henry James would say.

Unwilling to let well enough alone, alas, Gopnik books Charlie Ravioli for a return engagement in a chapter called "Third Thanksgiving: Bitterosities," where Olivia announces that Charlie has gotten himself hitched to a girl named Kweeda. "I am guessing at the spelling," muses Gopnik, "obviously thinking it likelier that a guy like Ravioli would marry an African princess, Kweeda, than Queeda, mere Balkan nobility." However her name is spelled, her future is cursed. Soon after, Olivia lets drop the grave news that Kweeda has died. Of what? ask her praying-mantis parents. "She died of a disease called Bitterosity," Olivia says, and, as if on cue, Gopnik whips a complete meal out of this inspired crumb, bannering it as a synonym for the corrosive spite that makes the cocktail-party circuit such a skeleton feast.

BITTEROSITY HAD TAKEN DOWN Kweeda; it could happen to anyone. She had moved to New York, I guess, and gotten it there, as we all do, or will, if we're not careful. What might Bitterosity *be*? Bitterness born of betrayal and disappointment, jealousy and resentment—half of life here involves safeguarding yourself from the plague of Bitterosity. It is a plague: you see the buboes of Bitterosity swelling on your body, the flush of Bitterosity rising on your face, and soon the cheerful young woman who arrived with a black leotard and a desire to dance, or the young man with the manuscript in his suitcase and an ache in his heart, becomes another grumbling embittered crank, a querulous angry radio-talk-show caller, an anonymous website poster, a failed writer complaining about his publisher and the stupidity of the critics and the public, or just another person contributing bad reviews of inoffensive restaurants to Zagat. Bitterosity has you in its grip, and, like poor Kweeda, you die from it. (Actually, I can count at least four people who have already died of Bitterosity, though not all of them quite know it. They are vampires of Bitterosity, living on in the strange Manhattan gloaming of its afterlife.)

The gnawing resentment of creative talents who never achieved what they desired or never received the breaks they felt they were due is a rich, stubbly grown-up subject that deserves better than the gentle spray of ironies that Gopnik employs whenever a fanciful notion dials his number. (The sharpest, funniest inventory of the shrapnel embedded in writers' tender hides remains Gilbert Sorrentino's bitteroso novel *Imaginative Qualities of Actual Things*.) But Gopnik cleaves to the cute. I can't help remembering the moment in Renata Adler's book when Gopnik, after having successfully pitched a story to *The New Yorker*'s new editor Robert Gottlieb ("With stammers, little laughs, upward puffs of air, and this new rubbing of hands, he described what he had in mind"), takes his humble leave and Gottlieb, after a silent beat, says, "Adam is adorable." A damning compliment, fit for a performing flea.

But adorability remains high on Gopnik's agenda, and when we get to the chapter "Death of a Goldfish," we can hear the wry chuckles percolating on the sitcom sound track from the opening setup—

> When our five-year-old daughter Olivia's goldfish, Bluie, died the other week, we were confronted with a crisis larger, or at least more intricate, than is entirely usual upon the death of a pet. Bluie's life and his passing came to involve so many larger elements—including the problem of consciousness and the plotline of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*—that it left us all bleary-eyed and a little shaken.

—and blossoming into cackles as wacky complications ensue:

> "Let's try this," Martha said. "Let's tell her that, though Bluie did die, this Bluie [a replacement fish, a ringer for the original] is kind of Bluie reborn."
>
> I thought she might have something, and in the next fifteen minutes, we did a quick, instinctive tour of the world's religions. We made up a risen-from-the-grave Christian story: the Passion of the Bluie. We considered a Buddhist story: Bluie goes round and round. We even played with a Jewish story: Bluie couldn't be kept alive by the doctors, but what a lovely bowl he left for his family!

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Luke's rites of passage aren't scanted. They are rolled out for our edification, too, though he isn't the fount of heartwarming family fare that his sister is. When he and his pal Theo spend an afternoon shooting pool in the badlands of SoHo, Gopnik is one happy pappy. "I beamed with pleasure and relief. They had played pool! Pool hustlers! What could be better than learning how to adjust a cue to strike a ball into a pocket, as compared to another meaningless two-hour session in front of a screen doing mindless hand-eye–coordination games? They were not druggishly indulging in a cynically engineered entertainment. They were in touch with Americana, with history!" Martha, mistress of derision, sinks another fang into her husband's fun. "Wasn't pool sort of like the video game of nineteen-aught-three?" she snarks. "It sounds like instead of letting them do mindless crap, you're getting them to do *dated* mindless crap." Chalk up another one in the Can't Win department.

In a later chapter Gopnik and Luke bond over baseball, guy stuff that they can share without mom's editorial interjections killing everything. When Luke opts for pinstripes, his father does likewise. "Luke remains a Yankees fan. I have, amazingly, become one myself, in the wary, ironic way that one can be a Yankees fan now, a pigeon watching the antics of the hawks from a safe distance." As a New Yorker for over thirty years, I can confidently assert that there is no such creature as a "wary, ironic" Yankees fan. (If such a being existed, the ghost of Billy Martin would slap it silly.) No true fan would declare home-team loyalty with such a sad-sack sigh, as if adjusting the elastic band in his shorts: "We have accepted the Yankees, more than we have embraced them. They are another New York accommodation that we have made." Gopnik just doesn't seem cut out for guy stuff; his fidgety navel-gazing keeps interfering.

Near the end of this vain book Gopnik tristfully acknowledges that now that his son and daughter are older, they are too big to slide under the microscope ("Neither of my children can any longer be my subjects"). But Olivia, who might as well be an honorary member of Salinger's Glass family, has one last tincture of precocious wisdom to impart. Asked by her father if she likes being a child, Olivia nods yes and answers sagely, "Being a child is the most awesomest thing." How come? She shrugs, as if following a stage direction. "Because your brains are, like, fresher and less filled up with memory. You have more free brains." If you want a brain somewhere between a crisp head of lettuce and a helium balloon, I suppose nothing beats childhood; but I suspect these are Gopnik's button-eyed sentiments rather than his daughter's. Her endorsement sounds more like the contrived effect of a writer "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of platitude" (to quote the late Marvin Mudrick) than it does a spontaneous response recorded for posterity, and its placement on the last page of the book carries the significance of its author sounding the closing bell, his homily concluded.

Her words, his—either way, I don't buy it. The freest brain in this book belongs not to a Blakean child with unused megabytes of memory but to Gopnik's late friend Kirk Varnedoe, the art historian and former chief curator at the Museum of Modern Art, whose death in 2003 from cancer left an unfillable void in the planetarium sky of New York's cultural life. Like the late Richard Martin, the former curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute, who died in 1999, Varnedoe was famous for opening his lectures without any fuss or prelude, keenly attacking his subject with a brisk, slicing Zen stroke and releasing his scholarship and brilliance in a series of crescendos. As Varnedoe's condition worsened, art, illness, and virtuoso talk converged: "Years of chemotherapy had left the veins in his arms so collapsed that sometimes it took half an hour for a nurse just to find an entry. He would grimace while being poked at with the needle, and then go on talking. He had the chemotherapy at one of the midtown extensions of the hospital, where the walls were earnestly decorated with Impressionist posters, Manet and Monet and Renoir—the art that he had taught a generation to relish for its spring-coiled internal contradictions and tensions there as something soothing for dying patients to look at."

A football fan who coached a local team that practiced in Central Park, Varnedoe trained his analytical eye one Saturday on the epochal "Hail Mary" pass thrown by Doug Flutie in 1984 in the Boston College–Miami game being re-broadcast on ESPN Classics, deconstructing the play—"That's no Hail Mary. Watch it again and you'll see. That's a coverage breakdown"—until its rusty components fit together in a shining new revelatory way. Quite a tutorial for a lazy Saturday. "And for one moment he looked as happy as I had ever known him: one more piece of the world's mysteries demystified without being debunked, a thing legendary and hallowed broken down into the real pattern of human initiative and human weakness and human action that had made it happen." So rarely does genuine animation pierce the thatched roof of this book's etchy prose that one can forgive the passage's hyperbole and table one's annoyance with Gopnik (until his next *New Yorker* piece, that is), because in the presence of critical powers stronger than his own he had the good sense to recede into the scene, reminding us that at the fade of day nothing beats adult conversation. You kids go play somewhere else. ■

Émigrés

Living is difficult. And even then,
I am a kind of Charon trafficking
them across the slough.

In moonlight, in swelter, in rain
I cram them into my metal craft.
Their teeth glimmer with doubt.

I can neither appease their nerves
nor guarantee safe passage.
Each places a coin inside my hand;

I eclipse their fingerprints with my own.
When the patrols come,
my assistants cast them

overboard unto their fate;
I cannot risk feelings of remorse—
the waters gamble with us.

An occasional owl's
self-preening voice
snags on the planets, fit enough

to withstand the human litter
like sloughed armor,
my hand at the rudder.

AARON BANNISTER

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David Thomson
Death Kit

A PHOTOGRAPHER'S LIFE, 1990–2005
By Annie Leibovitz
(Random House, 472 pp., $75)

IT IS AS PRETTY A LIFE AS ONE invented for a romance. Looking at Annie Leibovitz's portraits of celebrities, one realizes that when she is successful she captures what it is the subject would like to be, or to be seen as. Indeed, this whole book—heavier than many newborn babies—is what someone like Leibovitz wants to be seen as, and what her magazines urge upon us: rich but natural; famous but ordinary; beautiful but mortal; a still photograph, but going on forever; a celebrity but decent. It is a delicious recipe, but hard to digest. So, really, it's a matter of when you find yourself throwing up over these gravure pages. Don't lift the book without help, and don't browse it on a full stomach.

By now, you know Leibovitz as well as you know what she sees. As I write this, her testament is number 114 on Amazon, an extraordinary success for so expensive a book, and at a time when photography books don't sell. But there is a difference here: not only is this book about celebrities, but its author has herself become one. And why not? The bar is low. There is a museum show of her pictures. I have seen her lately on *Charlie Rose* and in a PBS *American Masters* program. And I may have missed other things, though I did see a bird-brained review of her triumph by Joyce Carol Oates in *The New York Review of Books*.

But Leibovitz fits the recipe, and the book is the proof of it. She is not beautiful, but she does not care, and in the process she has become "strong" and "herself." She has fine young children, and she has been in love. She has a sturdy, wholesome family that does things like cuddle and go to the beach. And she herself has been to the Hotel Gritti Palace in Venice, to Monument Valley (though that job turned out a bit of a mess), to Petra, and to Keith Richards's "library" in Weston, Connecticut.

As if strolling in a gallery, let us linger a moment over the Keith Richards picture, over his cunning gaze. Of course, he has known the photographer for a long time. When she worked for *Rolling Stone*, she traveled with his band. She had access, and access is a hallowed gift—it is the grail of the celebrity culture. But access goes both ways, doesn't it? And Keith has a look in the picture that says he isn't ready yet to be depicted as an idiot or a living corpse (he keeps that for the stage act). There is a streak of wit working both ways in the picture, and much of it comes from the nature of his "library." For this is one of those pictures where you can read the titles of the books. There are several "sets," books in fine bindings with gold lettering on the spines, in real leather or mock. Even with the best shooting techniques, it is hard to tell one from the other. There's the World Book, fifteen volumes or so. There's a set of Hemingway. There's Norman Mailer's *Marilyn*, and *The Two Mrs. Grenvilles*. There's a thesaurus, a collection of pub signs, and *Inside the KGB*. It is catholic, I suppose, a literary equivalent of the other things we can see on his shelves—the handcuffs, a brown paper bag, and one of those long picture frames with three empty ovals, as if Keith is still waiting for the faces to fill it.

When Leibovitz moves in, it is with a retinue and a serious budget. Maybe she brought the books with her, as props. I doubt it. I think Richards is still too opposed to the pompous (or he was in 1992) to let that happen—but the setting here is sublime, as well as the curl of the lip that wonders if we think he'd ever read any of this stuff on his shelves. As a magazine picture, it is an illustration of a certain misunderstanding of libraries, or of text itself. Once upon a time magazine illustrations were simply that: amplifications of a text. But in Leibovitz's era, the "art"—that is what they call it—has infiltrated the ads. And why not? Sometimes they use the same subjects. And they create a massive envy or insecurity (in us) that only the purchase of the book can assuage.

Leibovitz lived through the time when the shift from illustration to "art" occurred. Who recalls the text that went with her picture of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, him naked clinging to her clothed tree, taken only hours before he was killed? And although *Rolling Stone* didn't appreciate it yet, the text was becoming redundant. That is one reason why Leibovitz's pictures have commanded a budget sometimes ten times the sum given to the text. Her pictures were so fulsome, so ravishing, so now. Beside them, the text was time-consuming, fussy, and nostalgic for the sort of exercises in judgment that subsided, say, with Claus von Bülow, O.J. Simpson, and every famine about which chic guilt has usurped the real thing.

There is irony in that picture of Keith Richards, but now turn to Arnold Schwarzenegger on skis in a white t-shirt, so supreme in the snow-capped mountains that the photographer might have been Leni Riefenstahl. That picture says, Yes, that's me, and I like me like that, and fuck irony. And there is Nicole Kidman from a low angle in an empty Manhattan salon, her body spiraling in the same direction as the pile of white train that reaches up to her knees. That has the blaze of her insane confidence, as well as her love of posing for the still camera. Such pictures do not need a caption. They are the reaffirmation of the incontrovertible magnificence of celebrity, even if the real Kidman has a husband in and out of rehab while Arnold delivered his State of the State message on crutches—because he broke a leg skiing in Colorado—asking for universal medical coverage for California children.

Real celebrities have setbacks, of course. They fall, and sometimes they keep falling. Leibovitz remembers Demi Moore when she was something, and in a position to strut her pregnant belly naked on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. The magazine forgot Moore for a while, though she is back on the cover now, wrapped up so that just her killer look shows—with a copy line (or, more precisely, a copy lie) about not growing older. But real celebrity is the moment when the match flares, and Leibovitz is most excited by people who have just burst into flame. And by the knowledge that if she is photographing them, then truly they are hits. If these are the "it

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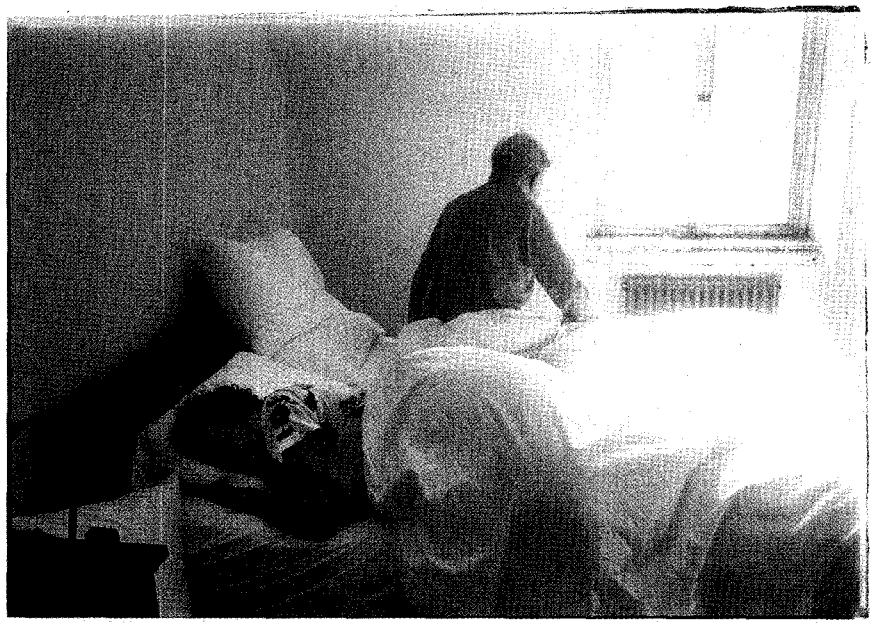
people," she is the one who confers the "it," or so she thinks. These pictures are the stamp of a certain sort of certification, but they provide no insight. None at all, ever. In flattering self-image and glamorous affect, Leibovitz's photographs steadily ignore inner life. They seem almost terrified of inwardness.

NOW, DESPITE THE RANGE OF her contentment, Leibovitz admits to something like frustration. She claims that for all her busyness she has one life, a single life that adds up: the person who does jobs for *Vanity Fair* or *Vogue* is not different from the person who photographs family, children, and friends. The book is filled with images of her family, which are scattered among the celebrity portraits. This suggests a certain incompetence about the deeper understanding of photographs. Leibovitz's book could have been assembled only by someone who has given very little thought to the traditions of writing on the nature of photography, some of it by her friend Susan Sontag. And so it is that this book ranges over all its miscellaneous subjects from the years 1990–2005.

There are pictures of her parents, her siblings, and their children—at the beach, at home, in bed, on the way somewhere. They are printed large sometimes, double-page spreads, like the Kidman shot for *Vogue*. But they are black-and-white, and grainy, and spontaneous. I like them well enough—but you know the limits of looking at another person's family album. These are snapshots, and they are willing to have their meanings private, and as memorials. They do not have anything like the aura and the neediness of celebrity. They say, Here are Mom and Dad, I shot them, they mean something to me. These are photographs like the ones we all take, to celebrate presence and appease absence, as markers that say, Yes, we were there together; look, you can see us all in one frame; and yes, the sun is bleeding in here and it's too dark there. But wouldn't it be vulgar and unfamilial to be perfect? After all, what else about our family life is perfect, beyond the fact that we have it?



COURTESY RANDOM HOUSE

ANNIE LEIBOVITZ, *My Mother and Father in the Cottage, Clifton Point,* 1997

When I say that these pictures are not very good, I mean to suggest only that the photographer did not notice any need for them to be good—whereas the terrific, chilling finish on the magazine shots is loaded down with ambition and intention. Those pictures are as cumbersome, as slow and heavy in their own thick air as would-be knockouts sent by a punch-drunk exhausted fighter. Their light and color are perfect in a field where perfect can easily mean retouching and Photoshopping, to say nothing of those procedures in life by which celebrities seek to score an extra season of youth. The magazine shots are the work of a team—not just on location, but also in the labs. But the snapshots are plainly Annie alone, and mercifully error-prone.

COMPARE THE PICTURE OF Demi Moore pregnant for *Vanity Fair* with the picture of Leibovitz pregnant herself. They are ten years apart. Leibovitz stands in her bedroom, hands on hips, her head turned, her long hair loose. She is braced against the great jut of her womb. She wears pearl earrings, but she could be anyone, anywhere. She looks tough, determined, a little old for the business at hand—she knows she lacks the great swag of emerald sateen robe and the vale of twilight that covered Moore's pubic area. (That was the cover, for Christ's sake.) Leibovitz is in black and white and her age (fifty-one) is not disguised, whereas Moore in her picture looks sculpted out of a light that is gold, amber, and skin tone. The serenity and the leanness of her face could even be Photoshopped. It looks, alas, all too real. For this woman does not look pregnant in her daily being. Tiredness is against her holy ghost. But exhaustion is Leibovitz's friend, and the redeemer of her picture.

The picture of Leibovitz herself pregnant is very touching. And it was taken by Susan Sontag. Much of this book has to do with Sontag. How perilous it is to venture such opinions, but just as I feel when I look at the movie *Vivre Sa Vie* that Jean-Luc Godard loved Anna Karina, I feel, when looking at this photograph, that Sontag loved Leibovitz. "I don't take a lot of purely personal pictures," Leibovitz writes in her short preface to the book. It was a habit that Sontag often remarked on, she adds. But in preparing this book, she realized that the period of this volume "is almost exactly the years I was with Susan."

What does "with Susan" mean? I don't mean to be intrusive, but the book does beckon us to behold, and to admire, this relationship. But it is haunted by ambiguity, at least in these pictures. What does it mean to be "with" someone? Marital ties far too easily assume that two people were "together" for decades, but some people married for a long time are not always, or often, "with" each other. This does not mean they are having affairs with other people. It means only that you can be technically "with" someone and quite indifferent to their inner being.

Plainly this was not so with Sontag and Leibovitz. There is undeniable love in some of these images. But then things get harrowing and complicated. Were

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they still "with" each other at the time of Sontag's dying, at the time of her death? I ask this because this book includes pictures that record Sontag's illness and death. These are not the pictures that get you onto *Charlie Rose* or *American Masters*, but there they are, and they are hideous. They represent a cold crossover of the two other strains of imagery in Leibovitz's book—celebrity pictures and private pictures, "purely personal pictures."

There are pictures from 1998 of Sontag, still recognizable, in Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. In some of these images there is already a distress in the subject that makes you wonder if she knew she was being photographed. (The photographer does not say.) There are chemotherapy pictures a little later, and from 1999 there is a very powerful portrait of Sontag in a black sweater with silver hair. But that is not all. The illness returned. This was "much more harrowing, and I didn't take any pictures of her at all until the end." There are pictures from the Cancer Research Center in Seattle. And there are pictures later still, in New York, of Sontag dying, and then of Sontag dead on a mortuary table, where she is not recognizable. Even the most celebrated looks can dwindle at the end, and be destroyed by pain.

These pictures are distant and stricken, as well they might be. But an air of question sticks to them—should Leibovitz be taking these pictures? It is far from clear that at the end she was "with" Sontag as she had been before. Grapple with this passage from the preface: "I forced myself to take pictures of Susan's last days. Perhaps the pictures completed the work she and I had begun together when she was sick in 1998. I didn't analyze it then. I just knew I had to do it." And this:

> I began searching for photographs of her [Sontag] to put in a little book that was intended to be given to the people who came to her memorial service. The project was important to me, because it made me feel close to her and helped me to begin to say good-bye. I found so many things I didn't remember or perhaps had not even seen before. I also began looking at all the photographs I had taken of the rest of my family. My father had been ill for some time, and I had flown down to Florida to be with him after spending Christmas in the hospital with Susan. She died before I could get back. He died six weeks later.

So Leibovitz was busy and she was not quite with Sontag at the end. Some alteration in their relationship had occurred. But she does not mention this, as if access might be at issue. She told Charlie Rose that she doubted whether Sontag would have wanted the final pictures to be shown. I think that must be taken to mean that Leibovitz had no clearance for them.

I do not mean to be squeamish, or to say that pictures of people dying or in extremis are forbidden. But I see a shadow of guilt or doubt over these pictures, something that obscures or traduces love. And this makes the pictures morally vulnerable. It leaves them in danger of seeming like voyeuristic shots of death's moment, which is the most individualized, the most private, moment of all. Without consent, they seem to me unpublishable, and much more distressing than the photographer knows. Even with consent, considerations of taste and decency might have intervened.

So I am not convinced that it is all the same life, seamless or without a bump. Annie Leibovitz is a very modest photographer. Her skills are far exceeded by her access, her expenses, and the very confined "curiosity" of her employers. Alas, when she takes her "purely personal pictures," despite the welcome abandonment of finesse, the earlier problems remain. Photography, as Susan Sontag observed, is a very tricky art of appropriation, in which the photographer may too easily assume that the camera and the opportunity are responsible for what has been done. This is not so. The photographer did it. And if a thing has not been given, then sometimes it has to be stolen. ■

Elisa New
Alone Together

THE PRICE OF WHITENESS: JEWS, RACE, AND AMERICAN IDENTITY
By Eric L. Goldstein
(Princeton University Press, 307 pp., $29.95)

STRANGERS IN THE LAND: BLACKS, JEWS, POST-HOLOCAUST AMERICA
By Eric J. Sundquist
(Harvard University Press, 662 pp., $35)

I.

IN UNCOUNTED, FLEETING, INTIMATE ways, American Jewish children growing up between *Brown* v. *Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 lived the changing landscape of Jewish and African American relations. I know I did. Born in 1958 at Albert Einstein Hospital, at the northern end of Broad Street in Philadelphia, I spent my first few years in a one-bedroom in Cheltenham, to which young couples like my parents moved with their babies from the city, their move one in a history of gestures of Jewish social mobility. Just over the city line, our garden apartment complex was a quick drive from the streets of high-stooped, dark-parlored rowhouses where my parents' parents, small manufacturers in textiles and furniture, had settled after World War II; and where, after my parents decided in 1964 to move to Washington, we would make frequent visits. Turning down one or another block of dusty brick and clapboard, my parents would point out the diners and dance floors and public high schools where they had dated each other, and other Jews of their class.

It was hard for me to imagine, because by the 1960s the city line, an informal color line, had been breached. It was the line that had divided the Levys, Dickmans, Goldmans, and Felsteins from the members of the AME, Pentecostal, and Baptist congregations who bought up the synagogues and rowhouses just outside it. By 1970, the last down-at-the-heels relatives of ours to live on this line had moved to Florida, and our driving

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route changed. Occasional lunchtime visits to uncles at their downtown places of business—large, busy factory spaces one entered through a freshly painted door on a crumbling block—took us across street after street of nothing but package stores, black kids on the stoops. Otherwise we shot off the expressway straight into the leafy suburbs. Though no one of my parent's generation would ever use the word *shvartze*, Philadelphia cousins my mother's age still called the black woman who took three buses to clean their houses "the girl." And it went without saying that when one of my cousins married a black policeman, her grandmother, my great-aunt, felt a shame from which she never really recovered.

Living near the University of Maryland, our life in the Washington suburbs exposed me to more open attitudes than in provincial Philadelphia. There were black children splashing in the pool of the summer camp I attended in 1965, and my favorite shows in the late '60s were *Julia*, with Diahann Carroll playing the warm, strict nurse working for a Jewish doctor, and *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In*, where Flip Wilson hinted at a harder-edged, more boisterous and distinctive black culture. In the aftermath of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, the mothers of our neighborhood decreed the whole District of Columbia, except for the Northwest, out of bounds for the carpool: the annual ride with my father to the Redskins game would now follow an exotic southeasterly route. This trip, and then the game itself, where black fans mingled with white, was probably my closest exposure to black culture until college.

Outside, that is, of Hebrew school. There, a focused and deliberate racial liberalism informed the curriculum. At Temple Sholom, which I attended until I was nine, I never heard of Rashi or Rambam, but I learned all about the Falashas, those miraculous black Jews, and about Freedom Rides. At Washington Hebrew Congregation, youth group kids like me could exchange textual study or discussion of the Yom Kippur War for tutoring black children in Southeast D.C. And every Jewish camp I attended had a popular trust-building event with a Follow the North Star theme: some bekerchiefed senior counselor led us out of bondage from an Egypt plagued by anti-Semitism and racism, freedom marked by guitar chords, and the singing of Israeli anthems and Negro (but universalist) spirituals. Thus was I readied for the countercultural ecumenicism and earnestness of Brandeis University circa 1976; and its student newspaper, *The Justice*; and its glam alumni duo, Angela Davis and Abbie Hoffman; and its burning campus issue, apartheid.

As it was for so many of my generation, college was for me a place of genuine transformation, an education in the duties of tolerance and the delights of diversity. Yet my college was—as my high school had been, and as my children's high schools and colleges still are—also a place where kids transported from low-income neighborhoods (by bus or scholarship or experimental housing development) ate and partied by themselves; where inadequate preparation sometimes meant underperformance or differential standards; and where currents of anxiety, defensiveness, resentment, and backlash bred and combined unhealthily. Brandeis in the '70s was a place where comity could shatter and insults fly (as when Louis Farrakhan came to campus), and so were virtually all the other institutions and communities to which I belonged and through which I passed as I grew up. On a visit to Washington from graduate school, I learned that the Silver Spring synagogue had been covered with anti-Jewish slurs: it would become the focus of Supreme Court deliberations on civil rights protection for groups other than African Americans. In my first year teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, a speech code was imposed to stabilize the communal mood after a Hebrew-speaking student called a black young woman a *behemah*: whether the word was translated as "beast" or "water buffalo" did not much assuage the sense of a wound, raw and gaping open. In 2001, Amiri Baraka, whose writing I had once assigned in a team-taught course called "Exodus and Memory," said that on September 11 the Jews stayed home.

My experiences, I trust, are no different from those of most American Jews my age, Jews who hoped to be part of the solution to what DuBois called the problem of the color line. We thought that by the twenty-first century the Jews whose universalism had made them first "American Hebrews" and then "liberals" would surely be brothers, not strangers, to those people who embraced their own exodus. The African American call to freedom—"Let my people go!"—echoed our own founding myth of emancipation. Surely Jews, persecuted, ghettoized, and then murdered in Europe, would by the twenty-first century be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the sons and daughters of slaves. Together, they would usher in a century free from all prejudice. But a new century finds us not strangers, but not brothers and sisters.

II.

JUST HOW WE HAVE GOTTEN WHERE we are, just why an erstwhile, perhaps mythologized, black-Jewish alliance has frayed, is the subject of these excellent new books. One by a historian, one by a literary scholar, these books, laid end to end, trace the whole course of black-Jewish relations from Reconstruction through the present day. And in the subtle kinship of their methodology, they also point to a crucial mutual dependence and interplay between historical and cultural analysis.

Eric L. Goldstein traces the instability of race as a category of Jewish self-description. Goldstein shows how the variability and the fitfulness of the Jews' embrace, and eschewal, of whiteness served shifting agendas over the course of American Jewish history. A palimpsest layering institutional, communal, literary, religious, and visual materials,

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Goldstein's study moves deftly and amusingly through periods and across cultural domains to show how the Jews came to describe themselves now as a race and now as a religion; now as a culture, now a nation, now a people, now an ethnicity, with Jewish self-presentation adapting and sometimes torquing in response to white America's less ambiguous relations with its black population.

Eric J. Sundquist's immense and serious book pays the closest attention ever given to the symbiosis and the alienation of Jews and African Americans in the aftermath of World War II, even as he traces the emergence of major works of Jewish and black literatures in this same period. The argument of Sundquist's magisterial book of 1993, *To Wake the Nations*, was that the most significant American achievements of the nineteenth century—Melville's, Twain's, Chestnutt's—were ineluctably engaged with the problem of the color line. Shifting his focus to post-Holocaust literature, Sundquist's new book reveals not only how much of the literature we will remember from the last half of the twentieth century is literature of America's "strangers"—blacks and Jews. He also reveals how the tragic alliance and the estrangement of these groups from each other emerged as late twentieth-century American literature's most haunting obsession.

Once, Goldstein reminds us, American Jews were "Hebrews." Descendants of the original "Semites," sponsors of "Judeo-Christian" universalism, these dignified pillars of stately Moorish "temples" in Cleveland, Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia could not be mistaken for huddled masses. They were rather—as the term "Hebrew" stressed—better regarded as émigrés from the Bible whom a chain of circumstance had detained in Europe for two millennia. "Hebrew" suggested linguistic and geographical ties to the desert cradle of civilization, but it could also be vaunted as a "racial" term, a term any Jew might wear proudly as a badge of a heroic world-historical mien. With his chief racial trait being a superior degree of civilization, this nineteenth-century American Hebrew presented unbroken ancestry, high cultivation, and preternatural persistence through persecution as a passport to white, middle-class, and socially mobile America. At home in the synagogue and on Main Street, the Hebrew went forth in American culture unafraid that his race stigmatized him.

But as the relatively homogeneous Central European Jewish population of the mid–nineteenth century altered—and as, decade by decade, the Hebrew community comprised a population more culturally divergent, more regionally dispersed, more politically and ideologically heterogeneous—the circumstances that made one kind of racial Jewishness attractive would give way to others. Hairpin communal turns, unlikely alliances, and bizarre inconsistencies would result. Early on, for instance, before the arrival en masse of those Eastern European Jews whose gabbing in Yiddish, inveterate traditionalism, and extravagant beards gave pause to defenders of the Hebrew "race," the Jewish woman had come in for her own racialization, this racialization in the service of Jewish continuity.

What else was there to do when "valorous women" of Central European stock took to gadding about the avenues in hats? Something had to be done to stanch the alarming flow of Hebrew women out of the home and into the emporia and the workshops. Thus, one of the earliest changes rung on the theme of race was that it produced the attractively domestic "Jewess," a deep-bosomed, hoop-earringed Semite of the hearth. If this American variety of the *eishet chayil* now stayed home to perpetuate the Jewish family, the Jewish cultural apparatus adapted to give her much more in the way of credit than her mother had enjoyed. Indeed, such magazines as *American Jewess* made the Jewish mother not just a breeder or a housewife but also the arbiter of taste, social tact, and the family's—and her own—leisure. This Jewess knew that mixing with gentiles at summer resorts was not the same as intermarriage. Her home preserved its Jewish flavor. The Jewess's ethnicity was domesticity's—and posterity's—retaining wall.

Enter those more traditional, less graceful Yiddish speakers from the East—slower to assimilate, comfortable in their enclaves of Yiddish and *kashrut*, and unversed in the essential American respect for the color line as a socioeconomic marker. Genteel rabbinic expositors might condescend to their eastern brothers in insisting their Judaism was a religion, its venues the temple and the Sabbath table, but from here, Goldstein shows, things took a sharp and momentous turn. For cherishers of Yiddishkeit would not see Jewishness as mere religion. They would see it as peoplehood. The Jews were folk, as the blacks were folk, and their travails in Europe paralleled the Negro's travails in the South.

By World War I, inconsistencies begin to crack and to craze the smooth front of the Jewish "communal" view of race. In the same years that the Yiddish *Forverts* gave a forum to socialists comparing worker exploitation to Negro slavery, Jewish socialist leaders such as Morris Hillquit made bargains with a unionism whose key recruiting tool was protection of the white working man. "Faith-Jews" from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations might plead in vain with "race" Jews, Yiddishists, black hats, to moderate their exhibitions of difference, only to suffer attacks from Yiddishists. And also from Zionists, whose own anti-religious, national, and often racialized version of peoplehood lionized the sun-blackened *halutz*, the Zionist pioneer, a hero of national pride.

But whether its orientation was to Judaism as religion or race, whether institutionally mainstream or raffishly bohemian, nearly every Jewish club had its minstrel show. By the 1920s, the *Forverts* used images of Aunt Jemimas and stereotypical Mammys to sell Duz soap to Eastern Europeans moving to Jewish sections of Manhattan. Such images flattered the upwardly mobile aspirations of the newly bourgeois northern Jews. Nationally, though, they did not play well. The northern Yiddish press might be as strident in its defense of the Scottsboro Boys as it had been on behalf of Leo Frank, but this was to the considerable dismay of the southern Jews ready to censor (as happened to Rabbi Edward Israel of Baltimore's Har Sinai) or to fire (as happened at Temple Beth Or in Montgomery, Alabama) rabbis whose activism exposed them to Klan-sponsored vitriol.

Meanwhile, in northern cities where black exclusion was less formalized than it was in the Jim Crow South, things went neighborhood by neighborhood, industry by industry, giving scope to a wider, but also more volatile, range of Jewish attitudes. For some Jews, memories of restrictive residence in Europe and the smart of exclusion from universities and other elite strongholds increased identification with African Americans. But in other communities Jews endorsed

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restrictive housing codes, hired only whites, and did all they could to represent their own whiteness. The shock of the Holocaust inclined Jewish officialdom to a racial liberalism that would bear them through the civil rights years and into the counterculture, when young Jews teased up kinky "Jew-fros" in tribute to their black friends. But the same years increased fears among Jews that their suburbs—with their good schools, stable real estate values, and well-maintained access lanes into the American leadership elite—were vulnerable, and that a younger generation's imprudent identification with the counterculture would imperil decades of progress.

MEANWHILE, IF THE MANIfold agendas and the shifting claims of a diverse and fractured Jewish community seeking vainly to present a unified "identity" complicated and tormented the American Jewish "line" on race, the African American "community," no less complex in its way, developed its own wide range of experiences with its Jewish brethren. The Jews were motivated by solidarity and brotherhood. The Jews were stuck in noblesse oblige and paternalism. The Jews were, as they have ever been, driven by greed and bloodsucking. Things changed from place to place, moment to moment. Each city, each neighborhood, South Side, North Side, had its own story. Any one incident (Scottsboro, or the Ocean Hill–Brownsville teachers' strike) was capable of branding images in memory that would tip the balance utterly.

Instead of an identity, Goldstein's book reveals the many negotiations and the constantly shifting tactics that divided Jews of any one decade not only from African Americans but also from each other, with generational fault lines becoming especially pronounced, as each generation was apt to find its parents' views not only dated but also inexplicable and shameful. My parents' generation cringed when their parents said "colored." I laughed nervously when mine said "Negro." My children raise their eyebrows at the deliberateness and delicacy that substitutes "African American" for "Afro-American," and the effort it takes me to pronounce a person "of color." For it sounds too much like my grandparents' "colored."

Goldstein's presentation of a century and a half of Jewish "negotiation" of whiteness is fascinating chapter by chapter, and deft in communicating the bewildering diversity and reactivity of Jewish relationships to the black community. He also offers wonderful cameos of segments of the population that tend to get lost in other histories. His rabbinic worthies have a pained and earnest consciousness of their duty to lead that helps us see through their ponderosities and bloviations. The adventures of his Jewish intellectuals in the young discipline of anthropology reveals how fine was the line between Franz Boas's pioneering studies and the measurement of cranial cavities and nose breadth. His multi-generational, multi-site portrait of Jewish womanhood—from the Jewess with her harp, to the Washington Heights housewives bidding for low-wage cleaning ladies to dust the piano, to Miss Daisy with her chauffeur—is genuinely fascinating. The visual images interspersed through the pages are especially well chosen, for they wonderfully illustrate the dramatically short half-lives of each generation's attitudes, each seeming already congealed in its datedness. For attitudes that date do not die. They remain part of a multi-layered archive vouchsafed, or secreted, in the memories of both blacks and Jews.

To flip through Goldstein's book is to be forced to see beyond the Jewish communal icons of the Freedom Riders and the earnestness of liberal curricula to a more troubled history of interaction. For, as Goldstein shows throughout his fine book, the whole archive—its triumphs and its shames—is ours. Raised in the well-meaning integrationist liberalism of the '60s and '70s, I still cannot forget the time my teeny aunt Lil stood on tiptoe to kiss my tennis-tanned father and told him he looked like a *shvartze*. Nor will I forget my own shrinking fear of a large, laughing black girl who crowded into a seat next to me on the camp bus. Or the anger, and then shame at my anger, and then anger at those but for whom there would be no shame, that I experienced as her friends shoved three and four into the green vinyl seats in front and behind.

III.

"NEVER FORGETTING" HAS its perils, of course, and these dangers are a theme of Sundquist's book. The much-vaunted memory of the Jews, their self-understanding as a "historical people," and their reliance on the foundational narrative of the exodus provided, Sundquist claims, a model readily adopted by America's unwilling immigrants. For those sold into Mississippian bondage, the Exodus tale especially had a forward thrust well-suiting a people in need of a myth to lift them, too, out of the present and into higher circumstances. Moreover, the injunction framing the Exodus—that you shall "tell it to your children"—provided not only memory but the conditions for narrative telling itself; for a literature of crossing, uplift, and transcendence. The Passover seder and the Negro spiritual, *The Rise of David Levinsky* and *Up From Slavery*—all are narratives that draw on the Exodus story to break out of stasis into linear history. All such stories show posterity the North Star or the far bank of the Jordan in stories of the way.

Yet just how it happened that memory became a faculty of shame, that self-expression became a reflex of the viscera, and that history became a bargaining chip: this is the sadder story of blacks and Jews in America that Sundquist traces. Taking for granted that literature matters, Sundquist is concerned to show how much of the post-Holocaust relationship between these groups has been negotiated in, and by means of, fiction, poetry, and the highly crafted non-fiction of the periodical press. Thus Sundquist's book is not only a study of the literature of black and Jewish relations; it is also a study of how, after World War II, black-Jewish relations came into their troubled maturity

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in literature, which served as the photographic plate on which black and Jewish relations developed.

Questions of quality—of the great and the shabby, the timeless and the topical—play no explicit role in Sundquist's argument, and yet this book is a moral argument for the high office, and the great risks, of literature. The most important works, as Sundquist treats them, are not just nods to, or even lenses on, passing moments. They are, like the Exodus story, progressive forces in history that deliver generation to generation, lifting us above our own transience and into more durable forms of understanding. Literary art commits readers of one generation, and then across generations, to an honest acknowledgement of where they have truly been and where they are truly going.

That the works and writers to achieve this stature for Sundquist are not those we might expect, that excellence will not depend on the racial identity or even the reputation of their writers, nor on the canonical order now assigned them on syllabuses all over America, is apparent early in *Strangers in the Land*. By the end of the book, Sundquist shakes things up quite a lot. He suggests, for instance, that the achievement of Paule Marshall qualifies her as perhaps the greatest living African American writer, and he will have commended Anna Deavere Smith and Julius Lester to our much closer attention. He will have implied that Malamud's engagement with issues of race and intellectual culture was more profound than Bellow's—treating Mr. Sammler's myopia as merely the vestibule to the tragic blindness of Harry Lesser. He will have confirmed Ralph Ellison's moral authority and came to doubt James Baldwin's.

SUNDQUIST'S CONCLUSION IS THAT Black Power's embrace of the Black Holocaust, the *reductio ad Hitlerum*, leads nearly every writer in its orbit to phantasm, myth, caricature, or the cheap effectiveness of raucous parody. Meanwhile, he does not stint to show how Jewish self-regard, and an anodyne Jewish avoidance of hard questions, have resulted in the proliferation of moral pedants and in an art too liable to middlebrow crowd-pleasing. If the African American fetishization of the anguish of slavery produces a literature driven to kill, to burn, and to deny its own transcendence, and thus much of its own vital history, the Jewish sentimentalization of the sufferer as moral avatar has filled the stage, the novel, and the multiplex with clichéd and facile handwringers. Add to this picture the Jewish writers, intellectuals, and activists romanticizing, and unwittingly mimicking, black machismo (from Norman Mailer to the neocons) and three-piece-suited black intellectuals cashing in on "Dialogue" and the Hanukkah market, and you begin to get a sense of Sundquist's scope, and of the broad, complexly stitched cultural canvas for which he assumes responsibility.

Still, despite its great richness, it would not be enough to call this book, as its jacket states, encyclopedic. *Strangers in the Land* is a much braver book than its compendiousness suggests. For the cumulative effect of Sundquist's careful search for the most complete explanatory contexts, and of his judicious counterpoising of black and Jewish materials, is that an awful lot of evidence is in. And thus the possibility of, and the obligation to, clear-eyed judgment draws nigh. By the end of the book, and in particular by the last two chapters, "Holocaust" and "Spooks," Sundquist has assembled nuanced criteria for the judgment of what ought to count for constructive, as opposed to obsessional, engagement; what does, and ought to, count for self-searching, as opposed to narcissistic, expression; what does, and what ought to, count for lastingly valuable, as opposed to compellingly, noticeable art. Some readers of Sundquist's book will accede to the persuasive inevitability of his conclusions. Others will regret and even resent his analyses. Examples are many, but the one that stood out for me was the implicit judgment Sundquist renders as to the relative importance of Philip Roth's work, and of Toni Morrison's, in the postwar American canon.

Can a whole book be marred by its epigraph? Can a major reputation be subverted, or curdled, by one drop of poison, tincturing the rest? It depends what the poison, and what its cultural effect. In the case of Toni Morrison, Sundquist's unemphatic, but also unmistakable, judgment is that the epigraph prefacing Morrison's celebrated *Beloved* ("Sixty million and more") betrays a negligence of fact and thus a moral slackness with which major works of art, and major artists, have no commerce. "Most writers who portray the black holocaust," Sundquist writes, "do not set out to debate the prior claims of the Jewish Holocaust, let alone parse ideological differences," but rather write against the "two distinctive histories whose differences ... must be brought into sharper focus." For Sundquist, the price of Morrison's having in this "infamous" epigraph tendentiously and unrepentantly "debated" the prior claims of the Holocaust means that she has mistaken "moral and spiritual arguments ... as well as the metaphoric constructions that sustain them" for factual ones. Despite her singular status as the only African American Nobel Prize winner that America has produced, and of *Beloved*'s reputation as the consummate novelistic expression of African American experience, Sundquist situates Morrison among writers at a dead end.

DISINCLINED TO INFLAMMATORY rhetoric, Sundquist lets the organization of his book pull a lot of critical freight. Coming after exposition of Baldwin's more demagogic uses of the Holocaust, after an account of Judy Chicago's 1992 "Arbeit Macht Frei/Work Makes Who Free?" whose "powerful, regimented design shows us worlds that may be set side by side but made to seem truly similar only if wrenched out of their respective times and places," Morrison's *Beloved* is dispatched in a relatively short diptych. Paired not even with the foregoing, but with S.E. Anderson's *Black Holocaust for Beginners*, a "pop culture" text from which it "differs not in purpose but only in genre and artistic accomplishment," *Beloved* is quietly moved out of world-class literature.

Sundquist tries hard to credit Morrison's famous lyrical account of the Middle Passage with aspiring to a "sublime" and thus potentially cathartic and enlightening strain of historical understanding. And he strains to be fair to this writer whose "highly stylized tragedy produces an effect that is undeniably monumental." Yet in the final analysis, the very monumentality of Morrison's baroque prose, and her aspirations to the scale of epic, seem to Sundquist of a piece with her "sixty million and more": not sublime, but exaggerated; not cleansingly tragic, but static; and stagey besides. She

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thus figures among those for whom not only the "past" but also "racial identity" are discoverable only through "enduring, unspeakable pain."

Who to turn to, then, for the precise and coruscating vision that we need? Which writers of the post-Holocaust era allow blacks and Jews to find grounds of analogy, mutuality, and sympathy rather than imitation, symbiosis, cultural vampirism? Sundquist provides us a rich syllabus of little-known readings. His groundbreaking chapter on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* argues for the great salience of this "children's" book in the moral education of twentieth-century Americans. A chapter on Malamud is similarly reorienting to reclaiming the career of a writer otherwise falling out of the canon of the greatest of Jewish-American writers. But the writer to whom Sundquist gives, as he subtly puts it, "the last word," is Philip Roth. In Roth, more than any other writer treated in his book, Sundquist finds the expositor with the grasp, the artist who for fifty years has had the courage, the tragic sense, and the heart equal to the problem of the color line.

"Are you a Negro?" the twenty-seven-year-old Roth had Brenda Patimkin inquire of Neil, her Newark suitor, in *Goodbye, Columbus*, in 1959. The matter of whether the term—a patent construction of blackness—could be applied to Jews was among that dazzling book's most searching questions. Of course, the hard vacancy and the broad caricature of Brenda Patimkin and the Patimkin family were probably only part of what roiled the Jewish community when this book appeared. For Roth also offered in this novella comparisons of a Jewish social climber, Neil, to a black kid in the Newark library dreaming over the nude beauties of Gauguin. He compared Neil, too, to the safely uniformed Patimkin maid, Carlotta, the official inferior permitted the literal cherries that Neil must steal (with, of course, her thrilled, because condescending and slumming permission) from ripe Brenda. And, of course, he had also begun to develop in Neil a deeply transgressive portrait of the Jewish man as he actually exists in America: not a pillar of the community, not an exemplar or Hebrew or liberal, and not any sort of a nice Jewish boy, but a Newarker, whose sexuality, honesty, creative virility, and capacity for truth's destructive probe would always come, in Goldstein's words, at the price of whiteness.

Beyond rabbi-baiting, and bubbe-bashing, and into the more elemental zones of shame and human need that Kafka but also James and also Dostoyevsky knew, Roth's gradually aging swordsmen—from the boyish masturbating Alex Portnoy to fantasizing Nathan on-the-make; from his disingenuous academics to his instant Israelis (Zion is his getaway spot for men in mid-life crises) to the sad, sad Swede and the grave-desecrating puppeteer Mickey Sabbath—grow more and more fallible, more and more stained by the contradictions of their psyches and their century. They leak and spurt their darker antisocial impulses; their bodily needs, their lies. From Coleman Silk to Bill Clinton, black or white, powerful or disgraced, in bed with a Jewess or with trailer trash, Roth's American man screws up every chance to get away, and does so out of an essential, ineluctable humanness.

Nor does Roth cuts him any slack for being "other." Making common cause with the outlaw or the slave, making your life a long Freedom Ride, wins you no special moral edge. Handwringers, get a life. The Jew cannot escape the privilege of his whiteness, of the social mobility that makes the individual accountable for whatever kind of failure or liar or fool he turns out to be. And those suffering extra insult, those reviled for their color, like *The Human Stain*'s Coleman Silk, or the Jews of *The Plot Against America*, are given not much more scope for self-exculpation. They cannot escape the moral compromise that a long history of passing and then playing the race card has heaped up. In an American culture still improvising its romances of black and white, landlord and tenant, Promised Land and Golden Land, equality is usually won at the price of mendacity; authenticity is often a pervert's and terrorist's game.

"No special deals here," declared Brenda Patimkin's father, the tanned and deeply dumb Mr. Patimkin, while tossing a new porcelain sink at his deeply dumb son Ron. It is a wonderful moment in Roth's debut novella when, to Ron's proposal that Patimkin Sink institute two separate-but-equal lunch shifts—one for Jewish management, the other for its Negro work force—Mr. Patimkin answers equably, winningly, automatically: no special deals. As Mr. Patimkin's good instincts would augur, Roth saw no warrant for letting the renewal, the rediscovery, of America's promise, have its valedictory in 1959 any more than he would let it die in 2005. It was not time in 1959 to say goodbye to Columbus. Nor, despite a half-century of backward as well as progressive movement, is it time to call the "plot" to destroy America won.

Even in Roth, good instincts, decency, and the great wisdom of the people sometimes prevail. True, paranoids, puritans, puppets, and pundits will ever wring this day's points out of polarizing exaggeration, the next's out of rapprochement. But all the while longer cultural processes and deeper mechanisms are knitting new patterns into the fabric of American life. That Roth's *The Plot Against America* was a best-seller tells us how mainstream, how unrepressed, how unmarginal the understanding of prejudice has become. Moreover, new norms in the American family, school, neighborhood, and workplace as well as the cinema, the iPod, the bookstore-café and the swim and tennis club, breed levels of familiarity inconsistent with contempt. And as the twenty-first-century's first studies of black-Jewish relations bring our scholarship abreast, in candor and courage, with our best art, there is hope yet, as Sundquist and Goldstein both hold out, that blacks and Jews in America are at the beginning of an era of greater, more dispassionate honesty with, and about, their own histories. Why should it not be, both scholars imply, that more genuine encounter and acknowledgement with the parallel and intersecting history of America's strangers may liberate us all, little by little, from the more stagnant forms of brotherhood, from the cycles of estrangement, and from the fetishes of identity and difference, in America? ■

CORRESPONDENCE

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assume they could simply copy its economy here. Still, there's good reason to think that the broader lessons about taxes and the welfare state are independent of size, starting with the fact that larger Scandinavian countries have adopted similar approaches and achieved similar results. And you don't have to take my word for it. Many highly respected economists, including a few I cited in my article, have reached the same conclusion. ■

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Track Changes

JUST LIKE MANY OF AMERICA'S railroads, Zambia's longest rail line was built by the Chinese. But the Tazara line, which links the landlocked country with neighboring Tanzania, wasn't built by coolies. Rather, it was built by Commies.

IT WAS THE 1970S, AND, IN THE NAME of Afro-Asian friendship and fraternal socialist solidarity, Chairman Mao built the countries a rail line to the sea. The idea was to get Zambia's copper onto the world market without having to rely on the old colonial network through Rhodesia and South Africa, whose governments denied Zambia access to punish it for supporting anti-apartheid groups. So thousands of Mao-jacketed engineers arrived, bearing blueprints for station buildings that could double as People's Cultural Centers in suburban Shanghai. By the time they were done, they had laid 1,800 kilometers of track, starting behind the Stalinist terminus that towers over this dusty provincial town and winding their way to an even more brutal edifice in downtown Dar es Salaam.

BUT, AS MY WIFE AND I LEARNED REPEATEDLY on our two-month trip across Africa, things have a way of not working out as planned. First, the world copper market collapsed. Then apartheid fell. Mao was succeeded by leaders more focused on the bottom line. Zambia and Tanzania don't exactly have a lot of money to spend on railway maintenance. The Tazara line, in other words, is in pretty rough shape.

THIS WAS NOT A PROBLEM FOR ME. BY the time we got to Zambia, we'd already schlepped halfway across the continent overland. I was determined to finish the job that way, too. My wife wasn't so sure. "Why don't we just fly?" she asked. I said that would be like taking a cross-country U.S. road trip but flying from Kansas City to Las Vegas. She suggested that might not be so bad, either. "Aw, c'mon," I said. "It'll only be 40 hours. And we'll be together."

NEITHER POINT TURNED OUT TO BE exactly true. The train only lets men and women stay together if they've booked a whole compartment—and there were no empty cabins left. So I landed with three other foreign travelers, and my wife wound up with three very proper Zambian women. My conversations involved beer prices in various backpacker locales. Hers involved the apparently urgent question of just why she had not yet had a child. Luckily, we were able to spend most of our waking hours together, drinking beer under the weak dome light of the first-class lounge (a classless society apparently didn't extend to railroads). We also spent significant chunks of time in the dining car, where the bathrooms still have Chinese lettering. I never did find out, though, whether Mao's legacy had anything to do with the Jackie Chan movie looping continuously on the lounge's tiny television.

AS FOR THE 40 HOURS PART, WE PRETTY much knew that was shot when the purser sat down with us at breakfast the first morning. "We had a little trouble with the loco last night," he explained, apologetically. "We are a little behind." How far? "Maybe six hours," he said. We soon paused for another two hours. That made eight. And, a bit later, during another unexplained stop, I saw a locomotive—our locomotive—heading the other way on a parallel track. It returned a couple hours later, and we were on our way. After a fashion.

IT WAS ONLY AFTER WE GOT BACK TO CIVilization that I learned our ride on the Tazara train had been more than just an anachronistic lark. Nearly 40 years after the project sparked uneasiness in Western capitals, big Chinese plans in Africa were again on everyone's mind. In Tanzania, the papers were full of news about the upcoming summit in Beijing for nearly every African head of state. Back home, we discovered stories like November's *New York Times Magazine* piece speculating about China's intentions in energy-rich Angola. They're building them a railroad, too.

NO DOUBT THAT TRAIN WILL LOOK A lot different. After all, not long before we took our rickety ride, China opened a train into Tibet that is a technological wonder, whatever its politics. And, unlike the fuzzy expressions of international friendship that undergirded Beijing's first foray into African railway construction, the Chinese projects in places like Angola have to do with oil and money—the basic stuff of self-interest. Still, I couldn't help but notice a parallel between our current anxieties about our fast-growing rival's recent African forays and the cold war alarums over Mao's foreign scheming. "The Chinese are our best friends," a Tanzanian enthuses, to the author's great consternation, in Shiva Naipaul's 1978 travelogue *North of South*. Nowadays, the concern is that the Chinese are great business partners, but it's otherwise pretty similar.

BACK ON BOARD, THE IDEA THAT THE eyes of the world might once have been on our train began to seem especially absurd by the end of day two—although that may have been because we had been drawn into a particularly frenetic drinking game with the irony-minded Western college kids who made up a hefty chunk of the ridership on our journey. Maybe someday, capitalist Chinese college kids will also have the money to take an out-of-the-way train mainly because it lets them tell people they went from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean overland. Since the stations along the line represent everything the People's Republic is busily tearing down back home, the voyage might have some nostalgia value.

THE PURSER MADE A FINAL PASS through the lounge late on our second full day on board. We'd been gawking out the window all afternoon as the train passed through a wild-animal preserve. (Getting to see giraffes and elephants is one upside of Maoist railroad planners' lack of attention to environmental niceties.) But now, he said, the fun would soon be over: We'd be in the Tanzanian capital, and on the coast, by 7:30. Which would have made it 50 hours flat. Needless to say, we were not so surprised when we pulled in at 8:15.

MICHAEL CURRIE SCHAFFER

Michael Currie Schaffer is a staff writer for THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER.

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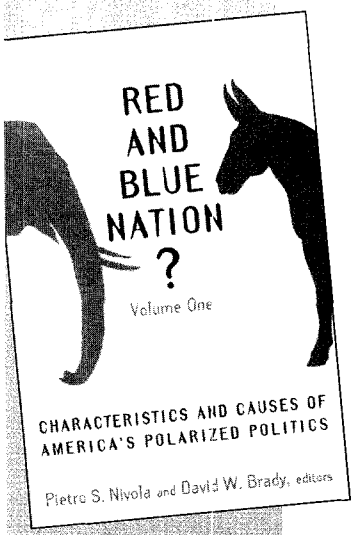
Critical Readings from Hoover Institution Fellows

Red and Blue Nation?

Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics

EDITED BY PIETRO S. NIVOLA AND DAVID W. BRADY


RED AND BLUE NATION ?
Volume One
CHARACTERISTICS AND CAUSES OF AMERICA'S POLARIZED POLITICS
Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, editors

*Analysts and pundits increasingly perceive a widening gulf between "red states" and "blue states." Yet the research to support that perception is scattered and sometimes difficult to parse. America's polarized politics, it is said, poses fundamental dangers for democratic and accountable government. Heightened partisanship is thought to degrade deliberation in Congress and threaten the integrity of other institutions, from the courts to the media. But how deep do the country's political divisions actually run? Are they truly wreaking havoc on the social fabric? Has America become a house divided? This important new book, *Red and Blue Nation?* gets to the bottom of this perplexing issue.*

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White Guilt

How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era

SHELBY STEELE

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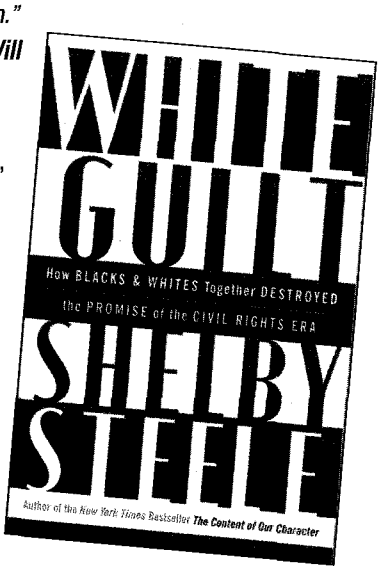
— George F. Will


WHITE GUILT
How BLACKS & WHITES Together DESTROYED the PROMISE of the CIVIL RIGHTS ERA
SHELBY STEELE
Author of the New York Times Bestseller The Content of Our Character

In 1955 the murderers of Emmett Till, a black Mississippi youth, were acquitted of their crime, undoubtedly because they were white. Forty years later, O. J. Simpson, whom many thought would be found guilty of murder by virtue of the DNA evidence against him, went free after his attorney portrayed him as a victim of racism. Clearly, a sea change has taken place in American culture, but how did it happen? In this important new work, distinguished race relations scholar Shelby Steele argues that the age of white supremacy has given way to an age of white guilt—and neither that has been good for African Americans.

Shelby Steele is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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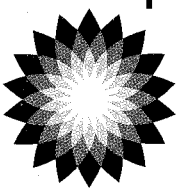

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